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THE SUN IN THE SANDS

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Richard Jefferies

The Story of a Norfolk Farm

Salar the Salmon





HENRY WILLIAMSON
in March 1921

THE SUN IN THE SANDS

by
HENRY WILLIAMSON

And Life is Colour and Warmth and Light,
And a striving evermore for these.

JULIAN GRENFELL, from *Into Battle*.

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I wrote my story of the post-war years to 1924 while sitting in the sun of Florida, among the slash-pines and the palmetto grasses, and at night in the room of a semi-derelict hotel at the edge of the swamp, seeing through the gauze of the open window fireflies among the treetops, while the whippoorwill uttered his startlingly beautiful cry against the stars. That was in 1934, a decade after the events described in the book had passed from my outer, but not from my inner life. The book was finished in May of that year, in the Brevoort Hotel in New York, when it was shown to a publisher, who thought it was "dated", as there was no interest remaining in the post-war years. The story was too far back in Time, and "too English" for the American public. So the book was put away, and the years covered it.

I laid down my pen and took to the plow, and now in 1944 my corn is ripening in the goldbeaterskin heat of summer, in the crinkling heat in which the hammers beat all day, far in the candent sky, as the American bombers fly into the east. The sky is blue glass glittering with flaws as it trundles round the sun; and thus the story of a young man from the war, aspiring to the vision of a new world, and seeking clarity beyond the confusions of human emotions, may be timely.

Part I

JULIAN

'Fierce midnights and famishing morrows.'

—Algernon Charles Swinburne

I

In March, 1921, through circumstances over which I had no control—the circumstances being my own feelings—I was abruptly homeless. “Now I warn you,” cried my father, in a trembling voice, “that if I find you in this house again, I shall have no alternative but to summon you for trespass. You have made my life an unbearable burden for the past six months. Your writing is merely an excuse to loaf, and to lead an idle, worthless life. I have known what has been going on for some time, but have said nothing. For months you have been coming home at one and two in the morning, the worse for drink. I have been unable to sleep. You have been getting up at noon, and then only to go out and get drunk again, with other wasters like yourself. You have now been out of the Army well over a year, and what work do you intend to do? None. You have had two jobs, and lost them both. And now that incident of the loaded revolver a week ago, when you threatened to kill yourself, has decided what has been in my mind for a long time now——”

“I’ve apologised for that incident, Father. I—I—you——” My tongue seemed to be closing my throat. “We did a swop, if you remember, my service Webley for your B.S.A. air-rifle. I haven’t drunk any beer for weeks now. I don’t like it; it always makes me ill. I’ve been working at night, and going for walks afterwards because it’s quiet then, and I can think——”

“I am sorry to say it, but I do not believe you. And in any case, I refuse to have this place treated as an hotel. You will please leave at once. I can stand no more.”

I felt it was a terrible tragedy. If Father had said that three months before, it would have been entirely true; but not now. I had just heard that my first novel had been accepted; and that

very evening I was going to a reception given by the publishers. It was then five o'clock in the afternoon. "Please will you permit me to shave and change into my evening kit?" I asked him. "Very well," he replied. I noticed that his face was drawn and haggard. The dissension between us had come to a head when my father, reading a leader in his paper, had declared that the Huns should be bled white, that the Junkers were treacherous brutes, as he had said on many occasions. I had retorted that the newspaper he read was evil: for it made men hate others they had never seen: that the German soldiers had been brave and clean fighters, and that they had been betrayed, like all the European generation of youth, by old and hateful men in power. Never before had I seen my father so agitated.

I changed my clothes rapidly, cursing the studs which my trembling fingers could not thrust easily into the starched holes. My heart was thumping in my ears, and I felt hollow and ill. Father did not understand: nobody understood. The dead had died in vain. The peace was more bitter than the war. One day—one day! My thoughts were confused, my body was trembling. Having packed by bag, I ran outside and strapped it to the carrier of my racing motorcycle. Returning, I went to shake him hurriedly by the hand. I could not look him in the face, lest he see the tears in my eyes. I could scarcely speak. He seemed surprised to see me. "Good-bye, Father, I apologise for my behaviour. One day——", but my voice was untrustworthy, and I turned away as he rose from his chair. Father had always got up when we shook hands in the past, I remembered, whenever I came to see him after absence, or on saying good-night. He was always courteous towards me; it was I who was discourteous to him. I did not realise then how much I had worried him with my irregular ways.

Nor did I realise why my father was often so irritable: a proud and sensitive nature feeling himself disprised, first by his own father when he was but a small boy, and later, too, after his marriage. Father was so reticent about himself (in contrast to my facile garrulity) that I learned only years afterwards that he was suffering from sleepless nights in the war, on duty as a special constable, and particularly from the effects of being blown several yards by an aerial torpedo from a Zeppelin, through the plate-glass window of a shop. In those days only one thought

moved in my mind: the tragedy of Mankind, and the world's redemption through the truth I would reveal in my work . . . but quiveringly I dared not think further. It was after the age of thirty, six years later, when I was beginning to develop many of the traits I had formerly deplored in my father's nature, that I began to feel understanding and therefore sympathy for him.

I left him, closing the door quietly, and went to see my mother who had been sitting, quiet as though ill, in another room.

"Good-bye, Mother," I said, pulling on my flying coat, with its warm linings of camel's-hair and oiled silk. "Mother, only wait! I *know* I shall succeed! Francis Thompson was turned out by his father, so was Shelley." I felt tears coming into my eyes again as I thought of those tragedies of un-understanding. "Good-bye, Mummie. Don't worry."

"I'll try not to, dear. You will write, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll write."

"And say something nice that I can show your father, won't you? He feels very lonely, you know."

I kissed her good-bye, hurriedly.

The door shut, with a multiple clicking of its several well-oiled locks. Then I remembered the B.S.A. air-rifle.

I waited during a minute which seemed very long, and then rang the bell, a short, timid ring. My mother opened the door immediately. Tears lay on her cheeks, but she tried to smile cheerfully, and speak in an ordinary voice.

"Mother, quick! I've forgotten the air-gun! Father will think I don't want his present. Mother, can you lend me some straps? No, it doesn't matter—string will do. Yes, I have a knife. Thanks. Yes. I'll write. Good-bye!"

We embraced once more; then clutching string and the gun in its brown canvas case, I ran away to where my fast motor-cycle, with its long silver-shining open exhaust pipe, awaited me. My thoughts were jumbled, yet I felt clearness coming upon me. I was turned out of home: my first book had been accepted by a publisher! My motorcycle had two gallons of petrol, costing nine shillings, in its tank, enough for a hundred and forty miles. I had three pounds in the bank, and twenty-two pounds ten shillings to come from the publisher, for my first novel. I breathed deeply, trepidantly. Where should I go? My motorcycle stood there, awaiting me.

I thought of the thousands of miles we had journeyed about England together, my beautiful long-stroke, single cylinder Brooklands Road Special Norton, and I. To York, along the Great North Road, where we had touched 67 m.p.h.; the many journeys between Folkestone and London, and along the south coast; to Cambridge for May Week—O, that awful moment of arrival, uninvited, with a fortnight's beard, to where Spica was staying with friends she didn't know very well—myself arriving muddy and bearded, after the long journey from Devon, held-up all night by the roadside, without food or sleep, rain rain rain, with only enough money for petrol: I must get there, I must see Spica! on and on and on in the grey dawn, belt-slipping in the everlasting rain, soaked from head to toes, I must get there to see Spica—and very pale of face was she when I arrived, she in large summery hat and frock, pale and quivering in the throat, yet courageously inviting me into a roomful of undergraduates and girls, and my hand trembling so that the tea-cup tipped and nearly fell: and, God, I had to borrow money from her, and before her hostess, to get to London, having no more petrol! The shame I had felt, the mortification—I pretended to be examining the machine standing there, but in reality I was trying to rid myself of the heaviness arising within me. Why had I remembered Spica? All must be forgotten: now I must think only of one thing, to control my thoughts, to be serene and equal-minded. I had cleaned and polished it that morning, my lovely Norton, with its silver-grey tank and long low riding position, dropped bars, and nickel-plated exhaust pipe curving from the cylinder and sweeping straight away to the rear, suggestive of its flashing speed. There, on the tank, a small silver star was painted, for Spica Virginis, which had been in conjunction with Mars in those faraway summer nights at Folkestone, that sad and hopeless summer now gone forever, faraway and lost in Time, nineteen-twenty. How we had fled together, the Norton and I, down the Dover Road from Fleet Street in the dawns of Sunday mornings, after the Sunday newspaper had "gone to bed", my faithful Norton and I blinding into the sunrise to be with Spica!

The 499 c.c. long-stroke B.R.S. Norton was the first model made after the war by a Birmingham firm which later was to become supreme, owing to its successes in the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy races. It weighed about a hundredweight, and

had no gears, no lamps, no horn, no extras whatever. Its engine drove a rubber belt from an automatically expanding Phillipson pulley to a large rim on the spokes of the back wheel. It had cost nearly a hundred pounds, and I had spent half of my war gratuity on its purchase. I loved it. My totem of a Barn Owl was painted on its silver-grey tank, beside the star of Spica Virginis.

Rapidly I secured the air-rifle to the bar over the tank, strapped my bag to the carrier, waved to the face in the window smiling wanly from behind flowers, and gripping the rubber-taped handlebars, shoved off, dropped the valve-lifter, opened the throttle, vaulted into the saddle, and roared away with the drumming beats of the engine sweetly loud in my ears. I got up to fifty miles an hour in a few seconds.

I knew where I was going. I was going to the house of a war-time acquaintance named Julian. Julian was a poet, aged twenty-three. He lived about a mile away. Julian and I had been for many walks together, and although I had found his companionship to be something of a strain, owing to his general scoffing and derisive attitude to life, and in particular to my literary ambitions, yet I felt we would yet be great friends. Julian, after considerable luck and skill as a scout pilot, with over four hundred flying hours on that eccentric and spiralling gyroscope called a Sopwith Camel, had crashed badly in a dog-fight when the improved Fokker biplanes, the D7's, had first appeared in mass over Chaulnes. Julian, after recovery, had been given a ground job, a "Kiwi". As a "Kiwi", or equipment officer, he had done no work at all, and had been given, because of his record, extensive sick leave, when he had formed habits that he attempted to continue in civilian life. He would drink a dozen and more pints at midday, and even more in the evening; and yet I had never seen him, or known anyone who had seen him, drunk. And the more Julian drank, the more derisive he became about most writers, including myself. I did not drink much beer, for five pints made me sick. There was something I liked about Julian; he had a tremendous passion for poetry. Swinburne was his great love; but the words that Julian spoke with such serious and sonorous intonation, with such passionate pride and scorn of "the world of little men", had no effect on me, except to drive me within my own thoughts. I became easily exhausted and silent in those days, soon after the war had ended.

I arrived at his father's house, feeling strangely elated. It was an adventure! In a few hours I would be at the party in London given by Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Beresford. That morning I had received a cheque from my agent, being the advance on account of royalties, less commission. Mr. Beresford was the reader for the publisher.

I told Julian's father that "the gov'nor had sacked me", this being what I considered a devil-may-care expression suitable for Julian's father.

"Ah," said the old gentleman, pulling his grey moustache, and regarding me sombrely for a few moments. He wore a grey frock coat, and a cravat tie. After awhile he went on, "That is most interesting: for I have been wondering for some time now how I can similarly rid myself of the useless incubus of that amazing and plausible young gentleman—ahem!—whom I so proudly realise to be my son."

I tried to look neutral.

The grey eyes in the drooping lids were staring at me. Pulling one drooping moustache, the old gentleman said thoughtfully:

"Have you had tea?"

"Thank you, but I won't have any, thanks."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow, nonsense! You mustn't let a little thing like a parental ejection interfere with an otherwise normal and well-ordered life. Julian would eat two teas in the same circumstances, I do assure you. Furthermore, you as a lover of animals should realise that one of nature's laws is based on the principle of the activated hoof. Of course you want tea."

He rang. Julian's aunt came into the room, followed by a maid.

"Hullo, Williamson. What a transformation! Washed, shaved, and dressed for dinner! The last time you were here, someone said, I forget who it was—Dorothy Caldwell I think, who was a W.A.A.C. during the War—yes, Dorothy Caldwell said, after you'd gone, 'Is it safe to sit near Williamson? He looks properly crummy'. She'd seen you and Julian coming back from sleeping under that haystack that morning. You went to see the stars, didn't you?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Humph!" said Julian's father. "Three stars, I suppose. That's where my bottle went, no doubt."

I gulped tea that was too hot. I explained that I wore my dinner jacket so early by necessity.

"Do my eyes deceive me," said the old gentleman, almost ponderously, as he leaned forward, "Can it be that you intend to meet the intelligentsia, or as Julian would say, the cognoscenti, or as Harold the Critic would say, the literati, of London tonight, wearing two studs of *bone* in your boiled shirt?"

I looked down at my shirt front, explaining that I had no other studs.

"Ah!" he replied, dropping his bantering tone, and becoming seriously concerned. "In that case I beg you to allow me to offer you a loan of a pair of gold studs. Seriously, my dear boy, this is an event in your life, and in spite of the general decay of manners since the War, I do assure you——" and speaking thus, he went upstairs to get me some studs. When he came down again, he said:

"You will find them on the bathroom table. I left the light on."

"Thank you, sir."

When these had replaced the penny bone studs, I returned to the room.

"Stay here, if you'd care to, for a few days," said Julian's aunt. "I've told them to light a fire in the spare bedroom."

"Thank you so much."

"Here's a key," said the old gentleman. "I expect you'll be late—but, however late you are, however much row you kick up, however drunk you are, I do assure you it will make no impression whatsoever on this household. There is beer in the cupboard under the stairs, in case you bring the cognoscenti with you—at least, there are a couple of dozen quart flagons there at the moment, but should my son choose to return with any of his sporting friends before you return, I can't guarantee that any will be left."

I thanked him for his kindness, but said that I had given up drinking; and also smoking, I added.

"We heard a rumour; but we put it down to another of Julian's charming little—shall we say fictions—now that you have a novel accepted by—let me see, a Scottish publisher, isn't it—yes, we took it to be one of Julian's innumerable fictions," the old gentleman continued, with his ponderous humour. He was

seventy-five years old. He had married late in life, and Julian was his only child. Mr. Warbeck's wife had died when Julian was a little boy, and Julian had been brought up by a governess and a housekeeper, both elderly. He had been a precocious child, and from a small public school had won a scholarship to Eton, from where he had gone to the war. "I should perhaps explain—" the voice of the old man went on, with ponderous humour, "and please realise that I speak only as a critic—and while assuring you of my sincere congratulations that you and your agent have extracted twenty-five pounds out of a Scots publisher—to continue: speaking as a critic, I am utterly at a loss to determine how you managed it. Even allowing for that curious and inexplicable thing, the public taste, I must say—only as a critic, please understand—that I am inclined to agree with my son Julian in this one thing, at least—amazing as it seems that Julian and I should have anything in common—that the fact of your book being published, or about to be published, leaves me, well, flabbergasted!"

"Don't you take any notice of what he says," said Julian's aunt, giving me a smile. "I thought the parts you read to me the other afternoon, the country descriptions I mean, quite charming."

"Well," said the old gentleman, "honestly, m'dear fellow, I've read worse novels—and by Heaven the world is full of very bad novels—" he looked challengingly at me. "Yes, I've read worse novels, but—" he paused, and added decisively, "not often."

I tried to smile easily. I was foolish to have lent him a typed copy. Julian and his father were much alike. It was their idea of antagonistic fun, perhaps. I had a thought to leave the house; and with a shock recalled that I had nowhere to go.

"I'm looking forward to reading all of it," said Julian's aunt.

"Oh, thank you," I heard myself murmuring. My heart was bubbling again: ever since a collapse in London, when I had been taken unconscious in an ambulance to a hospital, my heart had beaten irregularly. I was afraid to tell anyone about it; and my fear was that I might collapse again, at any moment, and so disgrace myself. The doctor had said it was due to nervous strain following the War, and told me to go away for a long rest in the country.

Julian's aunt went on knitting. The coal fire blazed in the early

Victorian grate. Much of the heat was wasted; rich smoke going up the chimney, unburned power, to foul the air of the world. One day such things would be looked upon with amazement: such squandering of the things of the earth, such fouling of the air and light of the world. Nobody understood: only one man in the world realised the utter falseness of earth. Yes, by my books I would destroy all present ideas of bringing up children, education, religion—all the false and dead ideas polluting the air of the world, already polluted by the industrial wickedness of the world, with its Great War as a consequence. I would reveal that poetry led to Christ: that wars arose because men, yes, because men,—but I dared not think beyond that point. When I wrote, the power would come upon me.

How hot it was in that room, my throat was fluttering, tears were in my eyes, my heart seemed to beat a double beat, and then a long pause wherein blackness seemed to come upon my interior sight. I sat very still in terror of imminent oblivion. The earth was rushing up to meet me, the map-like earth was growing large and sickeningly revolving. I closed my eyes, and gripped the edges of the chair, praying they would not notice me.

Soon I felt better, and sat there quietly, shielding my eyes with my hand against the glare of the incandescent gas mantel. I thought again of the criticism of Spica's mother, of my father's anger against me. No one understood that I was not really a waster, no one believed that I had a power in me that was unconscious and directed from the world of spiritual life: that Richard Jefferies was with me in the sunlight and under the stars. Only my mother, and she did not really understand: she sympathised with all her feeling, but her life's experiences were not my experiences. She did not understand. Sometimes I thought that only the dead of the War truly understood.

"It's getting close in here," the voice of Julian's aunt spoke. "I'll open the window."

"Do let me, please."

With relief I leapt up to open the window. Perhaps it was the heat after all. I was really sound, the doctor had assured me; but I must eat regular meals, and not sit up writing all night. I wanted to be strong and happy. I hated drinking beer. Julian had scoffed when on our last walk I had drunk milk during our midday bread and cheese.

"One day," he had said in his laughing, somewhat scornful tones, "I shall write my memoirs, and tell how the Master, after pointing at a heap of mud at the edge of a field and expatiating on the beauty of weeds sprouting as they have always sprouted, went into a pub—only I shall call it an inn or even a tavern in my old age—and called loudly for—a double milk! I shall then explain how the Master told me all about the white pillar of eternal light in which he saw God—and which in reality was a glass of milk sublimated. Seriously, old boy, you should make a distinction between the drinks of men and the food of tame cats! What great poetry, or even prose for that matter, was written on bread and milk?"

He had then pulled some manuscript from his pocket, and almost timidly had asked me if I minded listening to some of his translation of Catullus. "Yes, please do," I said, prepared to be patient until he stopped. I had listened, or tried to listen; the words had no meaning. He stopped, and gave a little grunt, and called for more beer, which he swallowed rapidly. The rest of the walk had been unhappy, for he had quoted Swinburne at me, in his intense way, and then had declared that I was deluding myself by thinking that I was going to alter the world by writing. I had left him at twilight determined never to see him again. Yet somehow, we met again, and Julian was tolerable, until——

The voice of Julian's father was saying:

"That delightful son of mine will no doubt return with a story of how still yet another publisher was impressed almost into making an offer for his Catullus translation, and will with ~~his~~ usual courtesy on such occasions suggest that he become ~~thereby~~ still more deeply in my debt; but the point, my dear sister, is that we three will, with any luck, be unmolested during dinner, when I propose to crack one of my last bottles of Veuve Cliquot in celebration of the acceptance of Williamson's masterpiece of—h'm h'm, forgive an old man his joke—youthful incoherence, and—er, h'm——"

Julian did not appear. We dined. Determined to begin a new life, I refused the champagne, though I felt ungracious in so doing. "All the more for me, my dear fellow!" remarked Mr. Warbeck. "Well, to your success, my young friend!" He held up his glass, and first smoothing out his grey moustache, drank the wine. I did not eat much, as I was afraid of indigestion. After-

wards I put the Norton under cover, and caught a train to London, arriving expectantly at Mr. Beresford's party at half-past nine o'clock.

2

Ms. Dawson-Scott, founder of *The Tomorrow Club*, of which I had been a member for about three months, without paying a subscription, had often told me that I was suffering from two things: a delayed adolescence, and the lack of what she called a good woman. As for the delayed adolescence, when I thought of the five years 1914-19, I wondered if "delayed" was the precise epithet. It was true, however, that between those years, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two, I had learned nothing to fit me for what was called a normal life.

Owing to my abnormal life, and feelings, I was at first disappointed when I arrived at Mr. Beresford's reception at a house of Inverness Terrace. Nothing tremendous or revelatory happened. The buzz of polite conversation had not ceased when my name had been called out. One part of me had almost expected a silence, people whispering urgently one to another, *This is the man who wrote "The Night" in "The English Review". He is the author of what is virtually a Fifth Gospel, in four volumes, which will, upon publication, though he has not yet written it, change the whole world. He has written the first quarter of it; we understand.* Flashes as of lightning, ectoplasmic sparks dancing about the room.

Instead, they talked about royalties, the oblique method of Conrad, the cost of paper and straw-boards, and would novels have to go above nine shillings, and even about the ordinary things of ordinary life. I had read very little at that time; I knew nothing of classic literature, nothing of philosophy or of revolutionary literature. All I knew of Bernard Shaw was what I heard older men say: Bernard Shaw is an ass, who writes with his tongue in his cheek, has no sincerity, and ought to be kicked out. I had found out my seniors about the war, where I had been and they had not, but at this time I had not fully realised that all they thought and said was wrong. Very secretly within myself I thought that evolution had, in me, chosen to take a leap for-

ward: that the ideas which burned in me had never been expressed in the world before.

After eating sandwiches and drinking claret-cup—I was by now extremely hungry—I felt happier. I talked to a dark attractive man leaning against a wall with his hands in his pockets, who was a famous poet called Walter de la Mare. I liked his alert way of talking, although what he said about Shakespeare seemed to me to be wrong. I had read little of Shakespeare; and had judged his writing by my own feelings. Also, Walter de la Mare had not known the difference between coltsfoot and henbane. This had astonished me. (I had known it myself only a few weeks, since owning a copy of John's *Flowers of the Field*.) Yet Walter de la Mare's question to me, *What is the difference?* had seemed to me to be almost startling. Walter de la Mare asking me what henbane was like! I loved his poetry; it was truly beautiful, he was one of the rare ones. I told him so, and he thanked me with a modest mien. And he had known Edward Thomas, whose book on Richard Jefferies I was longing to possess! It was out-of-print, never having gone into a second edition. Oh, why had Edward Thomas been killed? And to think that I had, all unknowingly, been only a short distance away from him on that ninth day of April nearly four years before, at the opening of the battle of Arras in the snow! Four years ago: it was as far away as Agincourt. I went back to the buffet, and ate a sandwich, feeling the sting of the sleet on my face again, losing myself in that haunting twilight of the past.

Walter de la Mare had given me permission to dedicate to him a second essay, *The Passing of the Blossom*, just accepted by Austen Harrison for *The English Review*. At the thought I felt happier. I had begun my literary career! I, Henry Williamson, was at an evening party, among celebrities! A young woman said to me, in answer to my question, "No, I'm not Miss Rebecca West, I'm Miss Storm Jameson." That had been said to me! I knew that name to be important: I had seen her photograph in *The Bookman*. A keen-eyed man wearing pince-nez spectacles, and with a lock of hair over one temple, peering at me sideways said, "Francis Thompson is a very great poet. I rank him with Milton. But don't you think it's unwise to try and rank poets, to declare that this poet is greater than that poet. Why rank them? Each true poet is himself. Yes, I'd certainly publish

any nature essay as good as Richard Jefferies. I didn't see *The Night* in *The English Review*. Were you paid for it? All work worth printing is worth payment."

That had been the celebrated J. C. Squire, talking to me! I, Henry Williamson, among the great names of contemporary literature! I talked to a man who had been badly wounded during the battle of the Somme, losing a leg; he too was recognisable from *The Bookman*, being no other than St. John Ervine. Surely I was listening to the stuff of literary history when he was telling me about H. G. Wells, and the dramatisation by himself of H. G. Wells' book, *The Wonderful Visit*, a play which recently had failed. "It was over-produced," said Mr. Ervine, shifting his stance. I dared, after that, to speak to Mrs. Ervine. I thought her a wonderful mate and helper. If only Spica were with me! Mournfully I knew that our un-understanding was final. To Miss Violet Hunt, whose famous face—I had seen it in old *Bookmans* at the public library—I thought most beautiful, I spoke on the one subject that then filled my life—Richard Jefferies. "He's like grass," she murmured, her eyes roving the room. "A little goes a long way. I much prefer Hudson." At this I felt I wanted to move away from her; she did not understand. The beautiful face was restless; the eyes never encountered mine; I spoke no more, but slipped away as Miss Rose Macaulay came up to speak to Miss Hunt. "Do you like Jefferies?" I next asked a very quiet woman standing alone. She had gentle brown eyes, and a fringe over her forehead. From *The Bookman* I had recognised Miss May Sinclair. "Yes," replied Miss May Sinclair, simply. "And do you love Francis Thompson?" I asked eagerly. "A beautiful poet," she replied. I told her about my novel, and she said she would look out for it. "It must be good if you like the country," she had said.

Mrs. Dawson-Scott, founder of the Tomorrow Club, was there also, cheerful and bright as ever; she was a dear, and had always been kind to me, despite my satirical references to her own novels upon occasion at the Tomorrow Club in a room in Long Acre. My satirical references were defensive; for to Mrs. Dawson-Scott I had once tremulously read part of my novel. *Very bad*, Mrs Dawson-Scott had said, *Wishy washy stuff. What you need, my dear boy, is a good woman*. I was silent, despairing as I saw inwardly Spica's pale oval face and large brown eyes, eager yet

sad; and to this despair was added fear that Mrs. Dawson-Scott's literary criticism was true. *Wishy washy stuff*. But when Mrs. Dawson-Scott had said that she didn't like Francis Thompson, and that the writings of Jefferies were "mere musings", my inner self was shut away from her thereafter, and outwardly I became someone other than that self. I made up startling stories, to be amusing and to avoid contact with my inner self, and told them as facts. Mrs. Dawson-Scott often told me I was a liar, but she told me nicely. *You say things which are not, my dear boy*. On several Sunday afternoons I had visited her house in St. John's Wood, where many men and women writers, painters, and musicians sat and stood and talked amidst tobacco smoke. I had liked them all at first; but I lost interest in one after another as they showed no interest in Jefferies, Thompson, Shelley, or Thomas Hardy. One afternoon a stranger had sung. Mrs. Dawson-Scott announced that he had just come over from Denmark, and was hoping to get engagements. He was a pink-faced, heavy, happy young man, wearing a pink shirt and dark suit. He smiled, and sang *Vesti la Giuba* from *Pagliacchi*. The top notes rang with terrific power in the room, and a small crowd gathered in the road outside. Afterwards I went and told him he was a great tenor. Modestly he thanked me. I went the next day to Covent Garden, trying to see someone to tell about this young tenor. After an hour hanging about, I left, and did no more about it, except to write a story for the Sunday paper for which I was working, but the Editor, who usually treated me with heavy, yet dry, humour, promptly "*spiked*" it. *Who's yer busker pal?* he had asked, hands in pockets. *Successor to Caruso?* *Well, confidence for confidence, I'm the successor to Pepys*. *You want an old cart-horse to pull your weekly dust-cart,* I told him, *Not a race-horse like me*. He was amused, and soon afterwards I left the paper. The tenor later sang for five pounds a night at Sir Henry Wood's Promenade Concerts. His name was Lauritz Melchior.

At Mrs. Dawson-Scott's I usually stayed to supper in the basement; playing the fool and being obliquely satirical about my hostess's ideas and novels, to the quiet amusement of her small and silent husband, who never appeared during the afternoon parties upstairs. Once, sent to call Mrs. Dawson-Scott's pretty blue-eyed daughter from the garden, where in her old blue W.R.A.F. uniform she was sweeping leaves from the lawn, I

looked in the basement window and found him typing his wife's new novel on an ancient typewriter looking like the inside of the Albert Hall. *Do you like literature?* I asked. *I hate literature!* he replied, and went on tapping with two fingers.

Now I had got my novel accepted; I was an author among authors. I stayed to the very end; indeed, I was the last to leave. Regretfully I said good-night to Mr. and Mrs. Beresford. Their encouragement, together with that of an enthusiastic and friendly literary agent, at that time probably did much to preserve my life. Although the Armistice had been signed two and a quarter years, the Great War was still continuing in the minds of many young old-soldiers: they were solitaires, fighting mentally the war-spirit of non-combatants. Everywhere there seemed a denial of truth, a deadly crudeness or cowardice or selfishness of feeling for other men, especially for our late enforced enemies. It was as though a bayonet were turning in me when I recalled how my father had risen from the dinner table once and had walked out of the room when I said that the German people were no more to be blamed for the War than the English or French or Russian people, but only the internecine money system. He returned, white with restraint, and I heard the terrible phrase *traitor to his country*. I jumped up, crying that that spirit had made the War and would make another one, and walked agitatedly about the room, while my mother looked wanly from one face to another, and attempted to introduce another subject of conversation. She looked as though she were trying to conceal a mortal wound. *Please sit down, and try not to upset your father*, she pleaded. No, I wouldn't, I *couldn't*, return to the meal. After closing time in *The Greyhound* Julian and I had walked and talked until 4 a.m. of the next frosty morning. I did not realise then that my behaviour towards my father was tactless and inconsiderate, that my behaviour in his house was bad, and had he not been so alone, so disprised as a boy by *his* father, who had squandered the family substance, his ideas might have been less hurtful to him, and therefore less vehemently expressed.

Walking down Inverness Terrace, I relived that scene again, but not with its pristine mental agony. I felt that power to be myself was now upon me. The air was clear, the stars shone over London. My tetralogy, as Mr. Beresford had called it, would clarify the causes of war for the world. With unbuttoned leather

coat, white silk scarf carelessly round neck and over shoulder, I walked along, bareheaded, hands in pockets, glad to be alive.

Soon after midnight I put the key in the lock, and opened the door of Julian's father's house, and listened. I heard heavy foot-falls, and shouting. Yes, Julian was home before me. Scarf and leather coat were slung on the coat-stand before entering the sitting-room. Julian stopped his intensive pacing of the carpet and turned to look at me. His wide forehead, from which the hair was flung back in Beethoven disorder, was frowning; his underlip was thrust out. He looked as though he were fighting invisible mental giants. His father sat in the chair in the corner beside the fire, also scowling; but chiefly the expression of the old grey man huddled there was one of fatigued yet unrelenting scorn. His eyes were as steady in scorn upon his son as his son's were upon those imaginary giants of the material world he was fighting on behalf of his beloved Swinburne.

For Julian lived devoutly in the truth of Swinburne's spirit as I lived for the truth of Richard Jefferies. Often Julian had told me, with émotion, how Swinburne had destroyed himself for poetry. Julian often quoted Swinburne's lines at me, devastating lines of nihilism, had I believed them:

*Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown grey
with thy breath,
Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, but thy dead shall go down
to the dead!*

"Hullo," I said, amiably.

Neither answered.

After awhile Julian, with a derisive smile, went to a side-board, poured out some beer, and offered it to me. "If you'll forgive me, I have decided to drink only water in future."

"Not even milk?" enquired Julian, amiably. "Then you have sold another novel, no doubt? Anyway, I drink to your success," he said gravely, courteously pronouncing each word with deliberate clearness. "Father and I were just discussing you," he went on. "I congratulate you, my friend. You are in the tradition! The young genius has been thrown out of his father's house! Excellent! Excellent!" He rubbed his hands together. "Well, old boy, seriously, I congratulate you. You've got a book taken.

You're one up on me. Can't I persuade you to have a little light ale after your storming of the citadel of fame?"

His father, watching him intently, "You'll notice, m'dear fellow, how my son's old-world courtesy shows itself in the air with which he offers a fellow guest the beer of his host. Such punctilio, however, does not apparently extend to the suggestion that I, as his host, albeit his parent, might care to be offered a glass of his own beer."

"Now you know, Father," said Julian, raising eyebrows and speaking with extreme courtesy, "that the doctor, to whom you pay regularly considerable sums of money, has told you not to drink beer after midday. You have to conserve your energy, Father. Don't glare at me like that, Father. I assure you you merely look extremely impotent. It is long past your bedtime, why not go to bed? Bed is for the old, beer is for the young—a natural law of life, Father."

The fire was blazing full in the black iron concave grate. "Come, my dear father!" went on Julian, "why not go to bed? All reasonable old men are in bed before midnight, I assure you." He drained his glass; he opened another bottle. "Well, Maître, what did you think of the cognoscenti? Don't forget to return Father's studs by the way. I may need them myself shortly."

"It seems to me a most unlikely event," said the old man.

"You're becoming more tedious than usual, Father," replied Julian, evenly. "Now why not go to bed? Your guest will not feel you are neglecting him."

The old man was staring at Julian fixedly. He said something that I could not catch.

"Honestly, Father, why don't you go to bed? You're becoming intolerably tedious. Your muttering and mumbling in the corner is not amusing. I apologise,"—to me—"for Father's ill-humour."

"What in the name of the devil——" began the old man, for there had come a thunderous knocking on the front door, accompanied by high-pitched almost hysterical laughter behind it.

"It sounds like old Bertie," remarked Julian equably.

"Well, I don't consider myself an intolerant individual," replied the old man, "but I utterly refuse to have that four-flushing blackguard inside my house!"

Again the door was violently hammered by the early Victorian knocker. Julian appeared indifferent to the noise.

"I suppose you've been with him again tonight? Look here—I—I—I'm damned if I put up with his insolence further." And seizing his stick, the old man walked out of the room. Julian emptied his glass and unscrewed another bottle. He seemed to be enjoying himself. "I wrote several sonnets tonight," he said quietly. "Bertie was expecting me in 'The Roebuck'. But Bertie bores me. I am going to write seriously, my friend. Before, I felt I was immature: I did not wish to add to the juvenilia of a weary world. Well, life's full of fun, old Omar was right, Maître." He rubbed his hands together. "I will live only for poetry, by God!" He swallowed a glass of beer.

Julian's father and the midnight visitor appeared to be having an argument on the doorstep. Apparently he and Julian had been playing billiards. He claimed that Julian owed him some money, and had failed to turn up at The Roebuck and pay it. The man called Bertie had been an infantry officer who had been invalided from Gallipoli with dysentery. He was tall and good-looking, with a charming manner. He had a reputation for being a billiard-sharper; I had always avoided him, being a little wary of his friendly manner. Julian had told me that he was married, that he had got rid of a fortune, and his wife had got rid of Bertie, taking the children away and refusing to see him. Old Bertie, said Julian, had scores of girls; he had a different one every evening; they fell for old Bertie, declared Julian, because he appealed to their protective instincts. He was living with his grandmother, the widow of a brewer, who believed that he was much misjudged—he gets away with it every time, said Julian.

The hall door shut, and Julian's parent re-entered the room. "That's settled that gentleman's hash," he remarked grimly. "Never have I seen a man take to his heels so swiftly upon the approach of a bobby. The unutterable scoundrel, demanding money for what he called your debt of honour!"

"Old Bertie's an intolerable bore," remarked Julian, casually. "Have some beer, Father."

"I am quite capable of getting my own beer for myself if I require it, thank you," retorted the other man.

I felt suddenly exhausted. The world was growing grey again. I did not want to remain in that house. I had stayed there once

before, when the guest room had been occupied; and sleeping in Julian's room, his snoring had driven me so frantic that I had got up, dressed, and gone out of the house, meaning to sleep under a haystack where I had dozed before. Julian had dressed also, and gone with me. Trees, hedges, and lanes glittered with frost that night, and our boots were bone-hard when we got up with the morning star, to tramp across the golf links to a shop in a side-street where carters and others were having coffee with eggs and bacon.

I dreaded to stay again in that house, with its everlasting conflicts. Suddenly I remembered the cottage in Devon, which I had rented, on impulse, two years previously, for five pounds a year. Of course, the Devon cottage! It had never occurred to me that I had a home of my own. My own home!

"Ha, the owl awakens," exclaimed Julian, approvingly.

"I'm going down to Devon tomorrow to live in my cottage!" I cried. And on impulse, "Will you come with me, Julian? We'll write there! Living there is very cheap, I've got twenty-six pounds! We'll work hard and walk hard, and start our literary careers together!"

The next morning it was decided. Julian's father would send me two guineas a week for his son's keep: we would share expenses, including the rent of one shilling and sixpence a week. Julian would have the balance of the two guineas for pocket money. Yes, we would work hard and walk hard; and we would both become famous. It would be the very thing for Julian, even as it was the very thing I needed. To be on our own, to win fame together in Devon!

3

Sunrise was behind me; the wet grey road ahead. I wore my old flying helmet, new ill-fitting goggles which let the wind into my left eye, ancient flying leather coat, my field boots and yellow breeches of cavalry twill. The speedometer needle wavered between forty and fifty. My feet and hands were cold. I was chill for lack of food, but not hungry. The note of the open exhaust drummed pleasantly in my ears. I gave another pumpful of oil to the engine, and holding the left grip of the

handlebar lightly, glanced over my right shoulder and downwards at the faint blue cloud diffusing away behind. This was the Great West Road, and I was on the way to Devon! My right fore-finger slid open the throttle, and I whacked the engine up to sixty, thrilling at the marvellous absence of vibration, when compared with my previous Norton, a nineteen-fourteen model bought for thirty pounds when home on leave after the battle of the Somme.

Basingstoke was passed, and this was the way to Andover. I had driven here once before, nearly two years before. Then, the journey to the Devon village had taken eleven hours. I had lost my way between Taunton and Barnstaple, turning north by error into a maze of red roads and deep, steep, winding Somerset lanes. This time I would make no mistake. I was determined to make record time. The trouble was that my leather gloves were sodden, and banging of fingers on thighs did not remove the feeling as of thorns driven under the nails. At Andover I was forced to stop; and, finding a coffee shop on the right of the square, sat down and ordered eggs and bacon and four cups of coffee in a row. I was thirsty after the night before; and in a hurry for my record. Also, I must be at the cottage when Julian arrived. He would be leaving Waterloo on the eleven o'clock train, which would arrive at Branton station shortly before four. The jingle would take fifty minutes to reach the village, up the two steep hills and the view far and wide over the sandhills and the sea. I must arrive before five o'clock.

Warm again, I went on my journey, passing and overtaking occasional cars going westward, shoving open the throttle lever of the Binks 3-jet rat-trap carburetter as I rocketed by, to show them what was leaving them behind. Coming to the long straight undulating road leading up to Salisbury Plain, I braced my arms, gripped with my knees the rubber pads laced across the tank, set my teeth, lay low along the frame, and opened the throttle wide. The thorn trees went by in diverging blurs. Wind scooped tears from my eyes behind the goggles. The speedometer needle wavered about 63. I kept down my fear of the bumpy road—until it zigzagged from my belly with the zigzagging of the machine. The handlebars seemed to be trying to pull my arms out of my body, as the wobble increased. I trod on the brake pedal. I was a long time falling, without sense of fear.

One of the beastly little over-smoking two-strokes I had overtaken a mile back clattered past me as I limped towards my spilled machine. One knee of my breeches was split. Mud and green of grass were on my crumpled coat. My hands were painful. The handlebars were woefully bent, one of the foot-rests was broken off, the carrier bracket was broken, the suitcase was burst, and pyjamas lay in the road with two hair-brushes.

"Had a spill?" asked the two-stroke owner, cheerfully.

I nodded curtly, repressing a desire to be savagely sarcastic and say, Oh, no, I'm merely opening a jumble sale.

"Far to go?"

"Devon."

"Won't get there today, will you?"

My body was quivering. My knee felt very thick and clumsy. While I stared at the grass he went to my motorcycle and lifted it up.

"Thanks very much," I said, "but I can manage, thank you."

"That's all right, old man, I like to help anyone in trouble. You sit down and take it easy." He fell over with the weight of my machine. Crash! Then he came towards me, and examined my torn knee.

"Looks nasty," he said. "There might easily be germs of lupus in those cuts. Lupus—that's lockjaw. Latin name—means wolf. Yes, you want to be careful on the road nowadays, old man. You were hopping it, you know!"

It was ten minutes before he would go away. By that time I was sorry I had been so curt, for he was kind—although part of the kindness was his insistence on putting carbolic tooth powder, a tin of which he happened to be carrying, on the broken skin of my knee-cap. Before he left I had taken his name and address and had promised to send him an inscribed copy of the first edition of my novel, which, I insisted, would become in time valuable.

"That's all right, old man. I'm not much of a book-reader. Haven't time in my job. I sell artificial manures. Don't you trouble, I'm always ready to help anyone in trouble—that's me. Good-bye, old man, good-bye. Sure you'll be all right? Cheerio, old man."

He spluttered and smoked away into the distance.

By this time I had straightened the Norton's handlebars, which had only been knocked askew from the locking nut in the

frame head. The petrol pipe was cracked at the soldered union. I tapped the solder with a screwdriver, until it ceased to drip. Otherwise, except for the broken foot-rest, I seemed to have been very lucky.

A length of hawthorn stick cut from the hedge and wedged into the tubing of the cross-piece would serve for a support to my heel; and having fixed this, I buttoned up my coat, drew on my soggy gloves, and stiffly pushed the bike along. It fired at three miles an hour, evenly and softly on the idling jet, and with the spark retarded. The familiar sound of the exhaust gladdened me, and I felt less unhappy for what appeared to be my Norton's untrustworthiness. A Brooklands Road Special model, with a certificate to say it had exceeded 70 m.p.h. on the track, to develop speed-wobble at 63 m.p.h.! The mudguard was gashed, too. However, the engine fired with beautiful slowness at three miles an hour. I walked beside it a few yards, holding only by the pommel of the saddle: One soft muffled beat fell from the exhaust every four-fifths of a second: the engine was beating more closely than my heart. Poomp! Poomp! Poomp! Poomp! it was the sound I loved, the beating of the engine's heart. I thanked God the bike was not smashed, as I had feared; the gashes in the mudguard could be smoothed with emery paper, and repainted, as soon as we got to Skirr Cottage. I threw my right leg across the saddle, and paddled with my feet, while slightly easing open the throttle. The engine's power flowed smoothly along the grey rubber belt; I could hear the slight clicking of the fastener as it was flung around the shining inner flanges of the pulley. At a steady forty-five miles an hour, the sweetest period of the engine, we ran westwards.

Julian was bringing with him my leather guncase and gun, the air-rifle, and a hold-all wherein were my saddle, boot-trees, bridle, and two boxes of books; my japanned uniform case containing my dinner jacket suit, and my civilian suits—one of blue serge made out of a hard-wearing cross-woven barathea khaki cloth dyed blue; and the other a tweed of unusual, and, I felt, distinctive pattern, made by a tailor at Folkestone. The two suits had cost fourteen guineas each; one day I would pay for them. I had a vague idea, from current jokes about not paying one's tailor, that it was not the correct thing to pay for one's clothes; hence the neglect in paying.

Now the road lay along the crest of the high ground, and a far view over the Plain fell away before me. To the right were the painted iron buildings of a military camp spreading out below and away over the grey-green country. I passed three dispatch riders of the Royal Engineers standing by the side of the road, with their slower machines, and wishing to show-off, opened the throttle and fled down the hill, almost coming off at the bend where the road forked. With luck I recovered from a wobble, and went on cautiously again.

Soon I was passing Stonehenge rising out of the yellow grass about three hundred yards from the road. Should I stop and look at the great upright stones which were so famous? Yes, I must do so, for Jefferies, who had been born in Wiltshire, had certainly walked there. I told myself that the big painted advertisement boards advertising a motor-tyre were offensive, a symbol of that materialism and negation of the spirit that one day would be altered through the Tetralogy about Maddison.

After wandering around the pillars, and wondering how the ancient Britons had managed to get them into that upright position, I had an idea to write to *The Times* my conclusions that the massive stones were dragged there by teams of mammoths: they were then tipped into pits, the cross-pieces were dragged across them, and afterwards the earth was dug away, leaving them in position. Jefferies had written a letter to *The Times*, several thousands of words long, about the Wiltshire Labourer, that had brought him fame; I would write an equally long letter, with descriptions of the Plain that would make me also famous! Exhilarated by this idea, I ran back to the Norton with the intention of turning south to Salisbury to see the bust of Jefferies in the cathedral. How many times had I gazed at a photograph of that marble bust, with the drooping eye-lids and high forehead, in Walter Besant's book on Richard Jefferies! His spirit, I knew, was near me at that moment: the wind sighing in the dead grasses was of Jefferies evermore.

Half an hour later, the Norton left outside, I was tip-toeing, leather helmet and goggles in hand, down the middle aisle of the cathedral. Memory dimly told that it had been built in the twelfth century, but this part was obviously a recent addition. It was so vast, concise, and new-looking; obviously modern architecture and engineering only could achieve such beauty. Never-

theless all churches should be razed to the ground, with all schools, I told myself, hastening discreetly to the northern transept, my heart beating almost violently that the Jefferies memorial was now very near. Then with tears running down my cheeks, I was pacing to and fro before the carved white marble, glad that no one else was near to interrupt my feeling for the great writer. I left after half an hour, to find the rain falling steadily—and that meant a belt slipping in the pulley while the engine raced, with water short-circuiting between sparking plug and cylinder-fins, and many hours of self-bracing rigidity against the cold.

However, it was now past midday, and I was hungry. A pint of beer was the thing to have! Before me was the image of Julian's face, as he smiled with some inner satisfaction, pacing the sitting-room of his father's house, rubbing his hands, and in my mind I heard his jovial, *Oh well, it's a poor heart that never rejoices!* Some beer, certainly, was indicated! Into the bar of the hotel I went and asked for a pint of bitter, and drank to Julian, now seeming a most desirable companion whose faults were no longer faults but my own defections in good-fellowship. To our joint housekeeping! Another half pint! Surely, with a glance at the downpour through the window, this was needed.

A restaurant opposite, a shop with the painted name BEAVIS seemed good enough; and there half an hour was spent in talk with the proprietor, who was also a baker and pastrycook. I learned, a little ruefully, that the name used by Jefferies for his superb *Bevis: the Story of a Boy*, was not pronounced in Wiltshire *Bevvis*, but Bee-vis. This information was almost a blow; but secretly I determined to call it Bevis as before, because the boy in the book could not be anything else but Bevis. We talked about Jefferies, and I talked about the surety of my future fame, for over half an hour; and then upstairs to a room with a fire and old oak carving, where lay old tattered copies of illustrated weekly papers, glanced through for the faces of beautiful girls while awaiting roast beef, baked potatoes, Yorkshire pudding, and brussels sprouts. Outside it rained steadily.

At half-past two o'clock I was standing in the gutter by the dripping motorcycle. My flying coat was buttoned tightly over several newspapers tied by string around my ribs. The sodden flying helmet was replaced by a cap whose peak would keep the rain from my eyes. If only I had brought some anti-beltslip solution! The local garages had none. Well, it was no use watching the water in the gutter eddying around the welts of my boots. Petrol turned on, plug-porcelain wiped dry, pack webbing straps adjusted around shoulders, throttle lever tested, then left open half-an-inch: the engine fired at once; and I vaulted on. Tuck the ends of the coat round knees. Turn left to the bridge over the Avon, up the street and under the railway bridge, and the road bending to the left to Wincanton and Taunton was our road. Mindful of skids, I went along at thirty miles an hour, to Wilton with the main road twisting through its cottages, and then the rain began to lash aslant my face. Soon the engine was racing while forward movement slowed; but friction heated the pulley flanges, this dried the belt, and we went forward suddenly.

It was no good, for soon the rain made the engine race again. To continue would mean the belt quickly wearing out; besides, I could average only about ten miles an hour under those conditions. I sought shelter for myself and Norton in a barn by the roadside, and lit a pipe, while the wet inside my collar felt its way between my shoulder blades. Sitting on a chopping block, I read *Songs of Innocence* by Blake, a poet I had recently discovered.

Later the grey sky became lighter, and the rain ceased. On again. After half a dozen miles the rain slanted down so violently sudden that spray was beaten upon the tarred road almost as high as my wheels. This time there should be no stopping; let the belt wear out. The tarred road ended, and the belt gripped again, for there was no beaten spray, and a way could be serpentine round the chalky puddles. I went through a village, whose mellowed stone cottages were built beyond a small brook, running clear and rippling-swift with emerald green weed all down one side of the village. The way led up a hill to the left beyond the last house, between hedges. Slowly to another vil-

lage, and on as before, although it seemed wiser to stay there for the night. Certainly the afternoon was growing duller, and it was hard to imagine that it had not always been raining. My knees were wet; the water from the coat was running down my boots, which were muddy, soft, and shapeless—my riding boots which so often had been boned and polished until they were more shiny than any old walnut table-top. C.

Now the dark grey road was stretching away into the light grey landscape. A flight of rooks flew slowly overhead. With engine alternately racing and gripping the belt, we went westwards up a long and gradual incline. Towards the top of the slope, where fir-trees were planted in lines beside the road, the belt broke. As I walked back to pick it up the rain fell so heavily and coldly that I had to shield my face with my sopping gloves. How lucky it was that Julian hadn't come on the carrier, as I had at first suggested. Only the need for our luggage to go by train had decided otherwise.

The business of unpacking tool-roll, cutting the ragged belt end, making a new hole with the belt punch, and searching through pockets for the fibre spare-link, was a miserable one. My hands were like cold wood. So numb was my body that the machine seemed too heavy to push, and I felt like crying with impotent rage when helplessly I fell over and across it. I lay there for half a minute, while the rain came down like aught out of a sieve, as the baker had said in Salisbury. The water was coursing down the side of the road in a muddy stream a yard wide.

I tried again, pushing desperately while the valve-lifter was dropped and raised again a dozen times in fifty yards. The engine would not fire. I pushed until my heart seemed to rise and fill my throat, and my sight darkened. Then, screaming a curse at the engine, I fell over and lay uncaring in water rushing over my right arm and shoulder.

The rest restored my strength, and I got up, telling myself that this was fun, that I was a free man, that I could sleep in a dry bed that night whatever happened: *for the War was over*. What was this compared with the winter of nineteen-fourteen when after the thaw I had stood all day and part of the night in clay-water to the tops of my thighs, without hope, without horizon, my life enslaved without reason? That was over, and

could never happen again. I was a free man, I was an accepted author, I was going to Devon, I was growing a beard, I had rejected civilisation just as Jefferies had, I was going to be a hermit. I had forever done with love of women, and henceforward Nature would be my only love. I would write of Nature as it had never been done before, except by Jefferies. I knew it. Who cared that everyone, except my mother, told me I was conceited, vain, morbid, undependable, egotistical? Rain, let it rain! The War was over!

The rain lessened, and with the unwet portion of my handkerchief taken from my breast pocket I wiped the porcelain insulator of the plug. Then I pushed again with determination. The engine fired at once, and I vaulted into the saddle, to crouch there shivering but happy at the thought that this was the way to Devon.

The long narrow road over the Great Plain joined the upper road lying east and west across the downs to London, and there the sky was darker, as though the wind were curiously dirty. Soon sleet was falling, and only by nearly closing my eyes was a forward sight possible. The wind was as a fleshing knife. Part of me cried out to stop, to abandon the machine, anything to escape the pain of ice now within my skull and my belly; another part of me cried, Onward forever! while yet another part strove to obliterate an imaginative picture of a room with a fire, a fire, a fire!

Now it was downhill, and too fast, I must force my right leg out of its rigidity in order to press on the brake pedal, to go slowly lest my wooden self steer helplessly into the grassy bank. The test-to-destruction self was overcome by the fire-praying self, which to escape pain thought of that first listening patrol just before the Christmas of nineteen-fourteen, at the beginning of that hard moonlight frost, when I had lain with two others for two hours, forty yards from the German wire, while my coat and gloves were frozen into the mud, and undetachable in the body's weakness. It had been worse a few weeks later when I had nearly lost both feet, which swelled up monstrously vermillion before beginning to turn blue and then black at the toes, which, but for more serious casualties and the arrival of a base hospital train, might have been amputated.

Sometime later I was jumping about beside a limekiln, swing-

ing arms and pausing to blow breath through my fingers. There was no warmth from the kiln, which had not been kindled long, judging by the least vapour blown over the rim above; but it was at least a shelter from the north-east. A little owl, *athene noctua*, lit on the stonework above, stared at me with yellow-ringed eyes, howled like a peacock, and flew away. I told myself to remember the fact that these birds which since introduction a few decades before had bred so numerous as to become pests, had spread so far west. Perhaps it had a nest in a hole in the kiln wall: but it was no occasion to make a search.

The rain ceased at twilight when, leaving my muddled machine in a coach house, I sought food and a bed for the night in *The Ship Inn* at Mere. My intention to write a chapter of the second volume of the tetralogy was dulled before the fire in the bar, where I sat until supper time, afterwards returning to sit there again and sip beer while talking to a young bank clerk who recently, he told me, had come to Mere. He was depressed by the place, and was not interested in my suggestion that he should invest in a copy of my first book when it was published the following October, and keep it for its eventual value as a first edition.

The next morning the journey westwards was begun again under a bright cold sky. My telegram to Julian, sent at six o'clock the previous night, telling him of the delay would, at the latest, have been delivered with the morning's post. My chin was defiantly rough with two days' growth of beard; my favourite short bulldog pipe clenched upside-down in my teeth. Filled with porridge, kippers, eggs, bacon, toast, marmalade, and four cups of coffee, I wasn't going to hurry. The pipe, drawing well and fragrantly, was finished as we pottered along at an amiable thirty.

Wincanton was passed, and Sparkford with its steaming milk factory at the bend of the road deeply rutted by the solid tyres of milk lorries. I wobbled to a standstill at the corner, and pushed the Norton beyond the grey slough.

Thenceforward the road surface was poor, from the traffic of the War. My boots were clotted with mud; my suitcase on the carrier was perpetually flapping; my arms, thin and tough as yew-wood, held the handlebars steady against an everlasting series of subdued shocks. By the right-hand curve of the churchyard wall before Langport I nearly came off, taking it too fast;

then through the narrow archway, and down the steep short hill into the town. Bread and cheese and beer at *The Black Swan*, while my feet and hands were warmed before the fire and the landlord—after suitable instruction about the future fame of his visitor—told me the story of a local poacher, but recently dead, with the bones of one of his victims lying, at that very moment, at the bottom of a well not a thousand miles from where I was sitting. The landlord had a manuscript, and one day would like me, as an author, to look at it. My head was full of my book, and the effect it would have on the world, altering its false education entirely: I nodded, drinking my beer, yes, one day, thanks very much: recalled what J. D. Beresford had replied, with his patient smile, when I had begun to tell him a most dramatic plot for the kind of book I myself did not want to write, *Thanks very much, but I find by experience that I can't take plots from other people*. Would the landlord accept a first edition copy of my book, if I sent it, which he must keep, for it would become valuable. Good morning, gentlemen! Gude marnin', zur!

The road wandered over a flat land where among rhines or dykes withies grew like corn: it must be Sedgemoor, I realised, recalling the name as an unrealisable battle in Meiklejohn's *History*. Hurray for Sedgemoor! I was on my Norton, going down to my own cottage in Devon, an author with a marvellous happy life before him, for I had for ever renounced love for art. Spica had not believed in me; her mother had told me to go, to achieve success, not everlastingly talk about it: to let others discover for themselves any talent I might possess. Neither Spica nor Spica's mother had realised how I had been doing hateful work all the week for the Sunday newspapers, and then, emptied out, had gone to the table in my room at night and written my book. I recalled with pain the occasion of the final scene of rejection. The dawn was glimmering on the Thames when I had got up from my doze on the editorial sofa of Carmelite House, and gone downstairs, and out by the foundry door to the Norton in the yard—and away down the Embankment to Vauxhall Bridge, over the river and down the deserted New Kent Road, fleeing along empty streets with the deep drum-notes of the exhaust to gladden me, proud of my Norton's graceful design, its tank of silver-and-black lined-out with red; and away past Lee and Eltham and the Crays to Maidstone and

the Dover road. I must blind, faster, faster, to sit beside Spica at breakfast! For two things only had life a purpose: for my love, called Spica; for my writing, which was for Spica. In myself, I believed, was a power and vision and truth clearer than in any other writer in the world, except in Richard Jefferies, William Blake, and Francis Thompson. These were, indeed, the only writers I had read—my mind could tell instantly my eyes saw a printed page, before actual reading, if the writer were of the true, rare clarity.

Spica did not love me, and yet it had seemed at the beginning that Spica had loved me. Darling Spica let me hold her hand, Spica held my hand, Spica looked steadfastly into my eyes, and surely Spica loved me; and yet Spica would not say, but only look at me steadfastly, her dark eyes so sad, so near to tears, my own eyes looking at me. She was eighteen, and had worked for a year in a laboratory at Cambridge, a V.A.D. in a venereal disease experimental laboratory, looking after white mice and inspecting how the *spirella spirocheta* colonised the rodents' blood-streams. Spica had murmured, *Yes, I believe in you, but I cannot love anyone*. Spica had believed in me, if weeping were belief; and on Monday morning, after the severe words of her mother, following the dismissal of myself, away I went in dejection, in doubt, a cross-sea of hope and despair, for another week in London, with its weary, wasteful search amidst traffic and houses for hideous things called news-stories, until in the evening candle-light I found myself in stillness, in the soft scratch of my pen moving rapidly, jerkily, over paper; a further five thousand words by midnight, and then out under the stars and their mystic truth. No letter in the mornings, or, if a letter, it would be words and phrases declaring Spica's inability to love, and of my own independable egotism, of my spirit self-fettered by egotism which eventually, if unchecked, would cripple my talent. I knew only that I had loved Spica when she had appeared to love, that Spica was my home, and with Spica I felt I would be safe, miraculously delivered from unhappiness. But it was not to be so; nor was it possible to understand what had happened, or why. *What would you do with a wife*, Spica had suddenly said: *you poor man, you can't even look after yourself, how then could you look after a wife and family?* I had looked at her, and had looked away again, not knowing what to say.

So the grey days and the dark nights passed somehow in hopeless hope. All finished now, I thought, good-bye Spica, as I sped along the drying road towards Taunton. I was twenty-four years old; the faithful English countryside was now to be my only love.

At Taunton, visualising Julian's jovial face at the end of another sixty miles, I stopped for a pint; and felt my rough chin with some satisfaction.

5

THE chalky grey mud of Wiltshire on my boots and mudguards was now rough-cast with the red mud of Somerset and, at last, Devon. Up the last hill, and round the winding lanes to the village. Round by the *King's Arms*, and there was my cottage, beyond the walled garden. Leaving the Norton against the wall, and pulling off my gloves, I went towards the cottage door, seeing gladly the outline of my owl-totem painted in yellow on a white background. The lower single window of the kitchen was closed, as also were the two windows above. The door was locked. Then the head of my neighbour Revvy's wife appeared around her hidden doorway, simultaneously with two other heads from the further cottage. All peered cautiously, revealing a minima of profile. I noticed also a face in an upstairs window of the farm opposite; while from behind one of the elm boles in the raised churchyard the sexton was peering.

"How are you, Mrs. Carter? How's Revvy? And who's this?" Yet another face was staring at me: a small white jam-smeared face looking out of a bundle of black rags on the floor. "Nice baby. Hullo, cat. Have you seen a gentleman in my cottage?"

"No, sir. But a telegram came last evening addressed to 'ee. I'll fetch the key."

I told her that we were coming to live in Skirr cottage. The two heads farther on were now more exposed. One was nodding, or waiting to nod, to me. Parts of bodies appeared. After shaking all available hands, and unlocking my door to take a quick look around upstairs and opening the casement windows, and clumping downstairs again, I went to the post office for my telegram.

The post office was shut. Someone in the street said that a telegram had been brought up by old Muggy Smith and taken back by him to the telegraph office in the next village. It was post office rules, someone explained. I cursed post office rules; and after a cigarette and a hasty walk around, went down the valley road on my motorcycle.

SWINBURNE'S SUCCESSOR COMPLETELY
OVERCOME BY THOUGHT OF PARTING
POSTPONEMENT OF ARRIVAL UNTIL
TOMORROW UNAVOIDABLE WARBECK

On return to the cottage I looked over it more thoroughly. It had been sublet to two lots of tenants since my occupation two years previously. The first lot, a mother with several small children, had stayed during the month of August, and left the place dirty, with some crockery smashed; the father had afterwards written me two letters, both unstamped, abusing me for swindling him by misrepresenting my "soldiers' billet" as a furnished cottage for £1 a week. As he had paid me nothing at all for his family's holiday, I thought this use of the word *swindle* an original one. The second tenant, a woman with a small baby, had taken it later for six months for five shillings a week, staying only two months during the winter. She wrote asking for a rebate of rent, which was given. It was good that there would be no more tenants now; for while the furniture was sufficient for myself, doubtless it was insufficient for other people. Downstairs there was a deal table, with rickety legs, made of scrap-wood by the local carpenter for £5; two worm-eaten, cane-bottom chairs, two sugar boxes, and an empty bee-hive. In the first bedroom was a camp-bed, with pillow, mattress, and army blankets, a rickety washstand made by the same carpenter for £1—it had a plain $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch matchboard top, and the legs were $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. This had been partly painted by myself in black and yellow stripes. The other furniture was a soap-box, a candlestick, and some heavy white china ware.

The second bedroom had a larger bed, with a broken rusty spring and a mattress which by the feel of it might have been stuffed with potatoes, bought for five shillings from the post-mistress; a similar washstand, but unpainted, with an identical

set of china; army blankets, two pillows, and two soap-boxes. There was a good thatch on the roof; and best of all, there was the sound of footfalls of white owls overhead as you went to sleep. In this room also was the only picture in the cottage, a photographic enlargement of myself as a very new subaltern in an hour-old uniform. Across this an observant child belonging to my first tenant had scrawled in pencil the word *Swank*.

From the second outgoing tenant I had bought about two hundredweight of coal. This should have been in the cellar under the stairs; but upon going downstairs to light a fire, I had observed only a few knobs lying amidst slack, together with some mouldering newspapers. Crouching in the cellar, holding a lighted candle in my hand, I read with haunting melancholy an official communiqué telling of the British advance through the forest of Mormal. From this farawayness I was recalled by a queer noise in the open doorway, through which most of the kitchen light came. There, a few inches from the ground, was a small pallid orb set with two staring dark eyes. As I stared back the bundle advanced towards me with curious rapidity; then it stopped and stared; and reversing its movement, disappeared as rapidly as it had come. It seemed to be familiar with the location of my coal-hole. I whistled, but my neighbour's baby did not return.

My next visitor was an old dog of the collie sort. He stared sadly at me until I went towards him holding out my hand in friendship, when he fled swiftly at this unfamiliar gesture down the passage-way between the cottages and their walled gardens.

Searching about outside, I found some damp twigs, and with these tried to make a fire in the rusty kitchen range. Two boxes of matches were used before a core of fire was breaking, with weak blue flames and much uncertain smoke, into the shut obscurity of my new home. Deciding that the flues must be choked with soot, I attempted to scrape them out with a soup-spoon tied to a stick. This did not make the draught any the more certain. Further inspection revealed that the iron was rusted through at the corners of the oven, and the sheet iron across the chimney was also eaten away, giving in several places a glimpse of sky above the chimney. Having pulled the sheet iron down, with about half a sackful of soot and mortar, I made a way clear for draught and smoke; and when my third and last box

of matches was used, the flames took real hold of the wood. Selected knobs of my remaining coal were placed with care at strategic points, and soon the kitchen became cheery.

Mattresses, blankets, and pillows were then brought down to air before my first fire. Julian's aunt had warned me to look for possible nests of mice in the mattresses; but fortunately the only marks upon them were of rust, and these marks were certainly pronounced.

Returning from the shop with a new kettle—the old one was rusted out—some eggs, butter, marmalade, and bread, I met the postman clumping along the sett-stoned passage. He rehearsed several times the touching of his hat. He seemed very glad to see me. Why hadn't I come to the cottage before? After his enthusiastic yet hesitant greetings he gave me, almost tenderly, a letter from my mother, also a parcel, before clumping away to his bicycle which he had left, as an act of fun and friendship, with its front wheel overlapping the rear wheel of my motor cycle.

Soon the kettle was singing like a starling, the eggs were chirruping like crickets, and I was sitting happily by my own fire, opening my parcel. Inside was a Dundee cake in a tin, three pairs of woollen socks knitted by Mother, a rubber hot water bottle, and a glass bottle of sweet syrupy cough mixture concocted by a local chemist, spoonfuls of which she had always wanted to give me during the winter. Scornfully I went to the door, meaning to toss it under the currant bushes; but no, oh no, that small tender face behind flowers! It would be throwing part of Mother away. I would keep it on my shelf, in the centre. I was turning back when the bonnet of a high and bony-looking black car, its ancient gear-box droning, appeared past the churchyard wall, and stopped in the lane with steam issuing from its radiator. The large red fur-collar'd face of Julian grinned towards me with satisfaction as he got out, feeling in his pocket. He was hatless, and wore his huge bearskin flying coat unbuttoned over a new brown suit, with new pointed brown shoes. His starched white cuffs and wing collar, worn with brown butterfly tie, and red-brown curly hair brushed back and oiled, gave him, with his distinct and courteous voice, a most distinguished appearance. He looked like a grand duke of Ruritania. The grand duke bestowed upon the driver three half-crowns, saying, "Oh, er—please keep the change."

Julian's rolled valise and several boxes of books, my tin uniform case, boots, guncase, and box of books were removed from the 1911 Argyll limousine. The driver and I carried them between us into the cottage.

"Ha!" said Julian, rubbing his hands together. "Well, Master, here we are! Welcome to Skirr Cottage, and our future fame!"

"I'll show you your bedroom——" I began.

"Oh, is there a bedroom? What a chap you are for surprises, Master!" Julian seemed highly pleased. "Eggs for tea! By heaven, I'm glad to be here. Did you have a good journey down?" His grand ducal manner, from the immense bearskin coat, was exhilarating. All the neighbours were watching intently, I observed.

I led the way upstairs, helping him to heave his valise into the inner bedroom. If he snored, I thought anxiously, I could always carry the camp-bed downstairs, and perhaps snoring wouldn't be audible with two doors shut, even though they were so flimsy.

Julian and I wolfed nearly all the new crusty loaf and half-pound of salt-dewy butter, with three eggs each, and knives thrust into the marmalade pot. He said his father was sending me, as I had suggested, two guineas weekly for his bed and board, the balance from his half share of expenses to be given to himself for petty cash.

"Which is the bed and which is the board I don't know," remarked Julian, after tea, prodding his steaming mattress. "But it all seems damned good to me. I went to see J. C. Squire yesterday about my translation of Catullus. He said it was very good indeed. He said he would speak to Secker about it. I hope to get fifty pounds advance—so you see, I may beat you yet, old boy."

"Congratulations!" I looked at him as at a different person, admiring his air of power and precision and his scholarship. He began to roll Latin sonorously off his tongue, while fixing me with his eyes. The only Latin I could quote was the first line of the first book of the Aeneid, the motto of my school, and one other line from Virgil which often I had spoken to myself.

Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mortalia mentem tangunt.

During a pause of his recitation I quoted this line to him. "Yes, old boy, that just about sums up the scheme of things. Oh

well, it's a poor heart that never rejoices!" He grunted with tolerant derision. "There's plenty of fun to be got out of the world still." We sat by the fire, talking. The church clock struck six. A slight restlessness came over him. Then he rubbed his hands together. Outside it was getting dark. He shifted his seat on the box. "Well, Maître, what shall we do?"

I was happy sitting by the fire. I would have to wash up, of course; but there was no hurry. Then I was going to write a chapter. After awhile Julian got up. A look of diffident solicitation was on his face.

"I say, old boy, I wonder——" His eyebrows arose to their limit. "Father will be sending the doings shortly. Er—meanwhile, I wonder if you could advance me a bit—say ten shillings."

This was awkward. "Well, as you know, Julian, we agreed to keep to the arrangement that I should give you the—er—the unexpended portion of the day's ration at the end of the week. I've got very little money, actually. Also, well—look here—here's a shilling—no, I'll make it one and sixpence."

"Thank you. What time would you like me to come back to dinner? Or don't we have dinner? Just as you please—I can eat anything, bread and cheese, cold meat——"

"I'll have to get some cheese. And onions," Julian and I had often lunched thus during our country walks—those walks which were always tedious after his half dozen midday pints.

"Excellent!" He rubbed his hands. "I'll go and explore the village. I say, Father would appreciate a telegram, if only to disappoint him in his belief that I would never get here. Could you—er—another bob, old boy?"

"The telegraph office is down the valley, and it will be shut now: but here you are. The better pub is to the left when you get to the top of the street, and then, first on the right, up a short steep hill. I'll be up about nine o'clock."

"Splendid! Well, old boy, if you're sure there's nothing I can do—I don't want to interfere with your mystic moods——"

"Well, I'm going to wash up, but don't you bother, thanks."

"Oh, but I must do my whack, Harry. What do we wash up in? A basin anywhere?"

"Curse, no. Oh, would you mind fetching one of the washing basins from upstairs? Take this candle, I shan't need my basin—I'm going to wash in the stream. We'll want some more cold

drinking water—I'll show you where the dipping well is, behind the cottage. I must get my bike in, too."

When we had washed up, I brought the Norton in and stood it against the wall with its rear wheel behind the door. Julian stood by to help me, although I said I needed no help. He shook himself into his bearskin coat, and went away with slow cautious steps in the darkness. It was a relief that he had gone, for now I could set my brass candlestick on the table, and with back to the fire, continue eagerly with the scene which seemed so good and exciting. The book was writing itself: I never knew what would happen more than a sentence ahead. Often as I wrote I chuckled, especially in the classroom scenes. My theme was true: the natural development of the boy in the sunshine, contrasted with the unnatural spoliation of the immature mental and nervous tissues when shut away from the sunshine, when forced to sit still and assimilate, while his nature silently and impotently resisted, dead and dreary and meaningless facts. The book would conclude at the end of the summer term of nineteen-fourteen, an irrefragable—a favourite word at the time—exposition of that which inevitably caused the Great War. To me everything was plain; and the spiritual force or life of the world was denied everywhere, misunderstood, misinterpreted by churches and professors. Jefferies was of the Christ-thought, which was as light within sunlight; and in spirit I was with them, and the other poets, the lightbringers. But I dared never speak of this to anyone; I feared and avoided conscious thought of it, as if it were something just beyond my strength. Once only had I dared to try and formulate it to a friend, feeling so ill at the arguments he began to bring forward to prove that pain was necessary for all development, that children should have a sterner discipline, that I had broken away from him and avoided his image with mental curses ever since.

The pen moved rapidly over the paper after the usual preliminary hesitations, the church clock struck with startling loudness, the fire went out, the clock struck again. I heard the throaty skirling of the barn owls and ran outside to peer into the darkness of elms and starry sky, and after breathing deeply with sight fixed on the evening star, I went back shivering to put on my leather coat, and continue writing. Soon afterwards the clock struck nine, and I broke off in the middle of a sentence, in

order to begin on the morrow the more easily. Nearly four thousand words! I began to reread at the beginning, lying half across the table, and was delighted with it. Had I written that? And that? Yet it was not good to reread like that, for it was a waste of nervous power: rigid discipline was part of the new life: at nine o'clock I was going to the inn: and to my satisfaction I found I was going.

The village was dark. A dull roaring filled the starry air. I felt the strength of sea and sky in my breast. Outside the inn the Atlantic's wave-roll was louder. Harty lighthouse moved its white beam across the Bay, and after a pause the red light shone out, glowing like an ember through the air of more than twenty miles.

Opening the door, the atmosphere smote hard and hot upon the forehead. Half a dozen men were standing around Julian, who was still wearing his bearskin. He held a pint glass in his hand. His face was very red, his head held high and proud. I interrupted his talk.

"Ah, Master!" he cried jovially. "Er, landlord, a pint for my friend, please. Well, and how was your daemon tonight, Maître? I am perfectly serious, old boy." His voice was grave and lower than usual. "I think you have a daemon, you see." Obviously the landlord had given him credit. "I am a genius too. I know I am! By God, this is a great place! Drink up, old boy, and have another!"

I drank my beer without pleasure, while feeling I was a kill-joy. Julian moved nearer to me, and said in a low voice, "I hope you don't mind, old boy, but I thought it diplomatic to stand these chaps a drink on this our first night. Come, old boy, come! It's a poor heart that never rejoices. Indigestion? Of course you haven't got indigestion! You can convince yourself you've got anything if you want to think it. Even a great prose style, Maître! Put that pint down, and have another. Er—landlord—er, will you please fill up all glasses again? Thank you."

Shortly before midnight, while Julian was snoring in the inner room, I toppled my bedding down the stairs, following it with the camp-bed. Owing to the cold I set it near the kitchen range, which was just warm. There was no ceiling in this room, only lime-washed floorboards; but with the blankets covering all but my nose I fell asleep sometime between one and two o'clock.

By eight o'clock we had washed with soap and towel while standing astride the small stream running under the churchyard wall; dressed; shaken and folded our blankets; and prepared a breakfast of porridge, boiled eggs, marmalade, and tea. We ate with leisure, with books propped against teapot or loaf. I was reading Book I of *Sinister Street*, which was extraordinarily interesting; Julian was absorbed in a yellow-covered volume, which he said was rare and valuable, of Rousseau's unexpurgated *Confessions*. My beard itched, but its noticeably increased length was pleasing.

After breakfast we washed up, and then to the shop to buy a large pail and mop. Several score gallons of stream water were sluiced over the floor, one of them nearly wetting the old cattle dog that appeared suddenly at the open door. The sun was shining, and about 9.30 a.m. we set out for a walk. We went down the red valley lane, and onwards to the Bay through a sandy plain behind dunes. Wind was westerly, a generous and sweet wind, with cloud shadows moving swiftly over sea and sand, and then sunlight rushing towards us. Just below the tide-mark men were breaking up a wooden wreck. For an hour or so we watched them working with bar and axe and sled, while carts were loaded with timbers of teak, oak, and pitch pine. A man said that lots of wood were to be auctioned on Saturday afternoon in a field adjoining the village. I determined to buy some for firing.

The waves were whitely thunderous on the shore, their surge driven far over the irregularly hollowed sands by the power of the west wind. Foam bubbles raced over the upper loose sand. Julian did not seem to want to watch them. Something gnawed him inwardly. He began to bite a fingernail. I realised it was past noon, when pubs opened. We went on with our walk, climbing up the footpath by the brown crumbling cliff to the roadway. I began to wish again, as on our previous expeditions, that he would not walk a few inches ahead of me, that he would not continually be turning to thrust his face near mine to quote sonorously from Swinburne, whose poems I thought not of the true, rare spirit. I knew of Swinburne only what Julian had told me, and judged the poet by Julian's recitations and by those

verses read at Julian's earnest request. No longer could I believe what Julian told me about anything, himself or any other living or dead writer or event or indeed anything, although everything he said had a convincing ring about it. What Julian said was usually interesting, but today I wanted to lose myself in sea and sky and grass, to walk thoughtless as the west wind. Many times I nearly forced myself to tell him that I didn't want to hear what he had to say: to be quiet, to release himself as the celandines and larks and gossamers in the Devon spring: but I did not like to hurt his feelings, thereby feeling miserable and, unconsciously, adding to his powerlessness to escape from his experience.

We were walking on the cliff path above a tract of wide and far-lying sand-hills, seeing the broad sands wet with the sea which had lapsed almost a mile from the fringe of the grey-green dunes. Two wooden wrecks were sunken in the sands, very small and distant. Across the sand-hills arose a white lighthouse, and still farther away, a fishing village built around the base of a green conical hill. The sea was narrow in the estuary, with the long lines of white where the rollers broke on the sandbanks of the bar.

"That is where Maddison dies," I said, despite myself. "He is drowned in that far estuary."

"What a chap you are!" retorted Julian, tolerantly, unbuttoning his light blue R.A.F. tunic with its pilot's wings and ribands, which he wore with a pair of flannel trousers and brown brogues. I wore a khaki tunic, with all except the buttons removed, over a white sweater and flannel trousers with boots. "Any man who can take himself so extraordinarily seriously as to drown himself in a book is certainly not worthy of drowning his nose in a tankard! Well, you beat me, old boy; I don't get you at all. What is this Maddison nonsense worth? All you've done is to write, and get accepted as a speculation, a whimsical Adam-and-Eve and-for-God's-sake-don't-pinch-me first novel of the type called promising by hack critics."

"You can laugh—but I——" I strode on faster. He hurried beside me.

"Take a joke, Maître, come on, Harry, old boy. You know I believe you are, or will be, a very fine writer. But as for being an immortal—to rank with Swinburne, or Hardy, or Keats—well, your conceit is intolerable. Why, I could have written your little story myself—only I wouldn't have wanted to."

To avoid the hotel, the nearness of which was unknown by Julian, I led the way down the steep sandy cliff to the shore. I pointed out a dead guillemot, its feathers clotted with the brown smear of oil-fuel waste, probably from some ship passing up the Severn Sea. Julian gave it a glance of disinterest, and grunted. Corks lay in the irregular line of seaweed, with the cast flight-quills of young herring gulls which recently had assumed mature plumage. There were many shells, of a white and pink fragility. Julian was striding just ahead of my left shoulder, telling me about his adventures in Bournemouth during convalescence from his crash. They were amusing, and my distrust of him was dissolved.

"I was a damned fool, Harry," his voice was declaiming. "After the rubber, when my partner and I had gone down about two thousand points at threepence a point, I rang the bell, and asked for the manager to come. When he came, I said, 'Oh, I forgot to tell you this morning, my father is coming for the week-end. Will you please reserve a suite on the first floor, for his Lordship'. 'Certainly, sir.' 'Oh, and can you cash me a cheque for a small amount—only fifty pounds?' As the old boy looked doubtful, I said, 'If it's inconvenient don't bother—I'll telegraph.' He said he could manage two tenners, but I said I'd telegraph. The suite was reserved—and they didn't like to ask me what Father's title was."

"How did you get out of it?"

"I went to London specially to send a telegram to myself, saying I wasn't coming for the week-end after all, and signing it with a Welsh name, because then it might look as though the title was one of Lloyd George's hundreds of mushroom middle-class peerages. When I got back to the hotel I opened the telegram, and showed it with an appropriate air of carelessness to the manager. He said he would cancel the booking. I said, 'Certainly not: his Lordship would never hear of it.'"

"And did you pay?"

"Certainly! Or rather, Father did. One has to pay for a title nowadays! Seriously, Father used to shell out a bit more freely in those days, when I was a young Knight of the Air."

A couple of pints wouldn't hurt old Julian; and as we climbed up the path to get bread and cheese in the bar of the hotel above, he continued his adventures, while still on leave. One morning

his father appeared in the long bar of the Carlton, where Julian was sitting with several of his London friends, among them well-known actors and actresses. "‘I have come to tell you,’ said the old boy, ‘the truth about my son. I hear he is representing me, as his parent, to be a rich man of title. That is a lie. I have, beside my pension, a diminishing income from royalties of my books, which are of a technical nature, dealing with ballistics and projectiles. My son is an unmitigated——’ Before he could go on, I got up and slapped him on the back, saying, ‘Unmitigated is hardly an original epithet; have a drink, Father.’ Aside to the others, I explained that Father was always like this towards the time of full moon. ‘Come, Father, let me take you home, you are more at home in the realm of pure mathematics than in here.’

"‘You young blackguard!’ retorted Father. ‘Let me show you something!’ The old boy, decently dressed—I’ll give him credit for that—in tall white Ascot hat, grey frock coat and trousers of Victorian cut, fumbled for his glasses. I waited while he had adjusted them on his nose, let him have a pull or two at his heavy grey cavalry moustache, and search in his pocket for what I knew was coming. He waved it at me, peering through his steel-rimmed travelling spectacles, and looking up, was about to speak, when I took it away, saying, ‘Now, Father, the War is over, and so you cannot sell the formula of your rocket-gun which will bombard Berlin from Woolwich Arsenal, driven by perpetual motion and an inverted force of gravity. Come, sir, you should not be at large. However, I think a little drink might be permissible.’ Then I insisted on taking his arm and leading the old boy out to a taxicab."

"What was the bit of paper?"

"My dear Maître, have you not guessed? It was merely one of Father's cheques, to which, to save him trouble, I had put my own name at the bottom. My account at Cox's was already overdrawn. Father is a good old boy under his bluff; and so the cheque was met."

"What happened to your friends?"

"Oh, I saw them occasionally. I was caught out once, though. We were playing poker. Pat said to me once, ‘You say you’ve been to New York, and stayed at the Waldorf Hotel, Julian; tell me, is it in Fifth Avenue, Sixth Avenue, or Seventh?’ ‘It moves about,’ I replied. ‘You’re a bloody liar, you’ve never

been to the United States,' cried Pat, and threw his whiskey and soda in my face. He was tight," recounted Julian, contemptuously.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Oh, I picked up a leather fire bucket—it was in an old pub near Oxford where a party of us had gone for the week-end—and threw it over him. Fortunately for me he was too tight to fight. Phyllis, who was living with him, was already bored with him, so we went off to London together in her *Metallurgique* racing car—she got it from an old boy who used to race at Brooklands, but never did anything owing to permanent wind-up—and I stayed at her flat. By God, old boy!" cried Julian, rubbing his hands, "It was a damned fine life! Have you ever been in a bath with a damned fine woman? By God, you haven't lived until you have, *Maître*! A nature lover, are you? Then for God's sake start loving nature naturally!"

"We'll fill the cottage up with actresses, Julian!"

"Now you are talking, old boy!"

We arrived at the bar of the hotel. Fortunately there were only ten minutes to closing time. Julian insisted that I was his guest now, and paid for bread and cheese, pickles, some cigarettes, and the beer. Afterwards we went on with our walk.

"Ha! now the Master assumes his reflective, nature-loving attitude, 'thinking the sun into a great dandelion, whose Christ-seeds are for all men'—aren't those your exact words?"

"By God, Julian, you've given me the title I want! *Dandelion Days*! Good for you. I say, what a memory you have! I read that bit to you three months ago. I thought you thought it rather weak."

"Rather weak! My dear Master, I am honoured by your confidences! I remember all you say, indeed, yes. I've never met anyone like you, Harry. I'm not much good, I know, but I do know enough to know that you've got what I haven't."

"Oh no, Julian. You know ever so much more than I do."

"What a chap you are, Harry! *Dandelion Days*—not so bad. The French call them *pissenlit*: but I prefer '*Pauper Spirits*'. By God, they are pauper spirits! Seriously, Harry, your book, so far as I've read, is damned good. Oh, you're all right, Harry. You're a good fellow—but—well, sometimes you've got me beat—sometimes I cannot decide whether you talk very great

sense or very great nonsense! By God, I'm enjoying this walk."

Julian was striding a foot ahead of me on my left, thrusting his crash-scarred face, with its red moustache and beard and thick auburn hair, too near my sight. Very soon he began rolling Swinburnian periods off his tongue. "By God, Harry, Swinburne was a greater poet than Thompson. Swinburne was, by Heaven, the greatest poet of all time!"

I turned abruptly and walked at right angles to our former line, towards the sand-hills. He followed. I ran. He ran after me. Soon he was winded. I ran on. Looking back, before entering a wind-carven valley of sand and rabbit bones and bleached shells, I saw him walking slowly, with bent head, gnawing the nails of his left hand. He seemed like a man who had lost something.

7

WE settled down after a week or two. We wrote in the morning, we walked in the afternoon, and I wrote again in the evening, when usually Julian went up to the pub. One evening, after tea, in a low and most considerate voice, he said he was going for a walk.

"Good luck to the masterpiece, old boy. It is a masterpiece, Harry—of a sort. It is Shakespearian—in a way. Er—could you manage a few bob, Maître? I want to pay the shoemaker for putting those tips to my heels this morning."

"Don't bother, Julian. I'll settle with him."

After hesitation, Julian tip-toed out, softly closing the door behind him. Seating myself again at the rickety table, before the solitary candle, I settled down to write. Outside the eve-star shone in the west, with the new moon sinking to the far Atlantic. Two rooks in the elms spoke softly one to another. One of the barn owls cried *skirr-rr-rr* past the open window. As always, the sound thrilled me; and then I was sad, thinking of Spica. Spica had not written to me for over a month, nor had I written to her. What was the use? Love and grief—they were the same thing. The beautiful countryside would always be sufficient now. But to work! Had I not an article commissioned, my first article to be ordered by an Editor? I read yet once again the letter which had been lying on the table on returning from our walk. It was

from the Editor of *The Millinery Trades Journal*, a new paper. The Editor had written to ask me to write something about birds and the Plumage Bill! He offered me 1½d. a line, and "would not venture to restrict my subject", but could I write to the caption *The Mating-time Millinery of Birds*, length twelve hundred words? Heavens, what a title! Still, it meant I had begun as a serious free-lance journalist, and of course I would write it. I had not shown the letter to Julian, well imagining how he would comment on it.

A good fire blazed in the open range. That afternoon we had been in the pinewoods in a valley over the hills, and returned with two sackfuls of cones and broken sticks. Everything in my life now was new, and I felt myself to be living fully. On the way down the hill that afternoon I had watched two kids being born. The nanny goat bleated in pain, but an hour afterwards all three were happy, the kids skipping about in the sunshine. A billy goat, tethered near, had been almost as interested as I had been. Birth seemed a beautiful thing: the mother love and the soft innocence of the new-born.

I was happy. That evening from the top of the church tower, whither the sexton-postman had invited me, I watched the sun going down beyond the headland. The colours of the "slaughtered sun" changed every few moments; first rufous, then vermillion, then tawny, reflecting on the clouds drifting up from the south-west. They faded, and a purple vapour framed the ocean-sinking sun. This was my life now: never again would I bring loss upon myself by falling in love. Never again would I enter human society.

With delight I read what I had just written in my journal, one of two big thick ledgers of ruled paper which I had brought with me out of the War.

March 14. I have decided to give the tetralogy a happy ending. I have done this because I consider it truer for the modern world whose makers will be the young men tried in the hell of war, given a wisdom beyond the material wisdom of the old men. A new Europe shall arise out of the ruins of the old; and Maddison's triumph shall be the formula for the new way of thought. *Per ardua ad astra* indeed! Maddison comes back. He refuses to die, to be drowned, to be crucified. He sees Mars and Spica Virginis

while in the water, and *keeps alive* by his spirit. He comes back, and sees Mary at night in the cornfield behind her house. He is a new man, a great man, he sees his faults, his soul is born, he is as strong as the world, he is going to show Mary's mother that he is right, he will leave Mary for a year, and then will come back, having made himself acknowledged as a poet. Mary falls down at his feet and clasps his knees in the moonlight. He sinks down, and cups her face in his hand, kisses her soft sweet eyes. She is his lady, and he is her "very gentle knight", even as Spica herself wrote to me in her last letter just before Christmas. And thus ends the tetralogy, the decadent sophistry of materialism of the old world, triumphed over because he is strong and has Truth for his guiding star. By power of his personality, his genius, he is going to pull through, he is going to give the new idea to others! From *wishing* that "man should come into his heritage of the earth", he is bludgeoned, un-understood; he bows his head, he is crucified; but he comes down from the cross lest those who crucified him should suffer; they are immature, he thinks, he will not let them hurt themselves. Immortality is now, he is going to make all happy as he can—to use his genius for making others see that what he sees is Truth, and seeing, so may they come to happiness. For most people are like children looking for the mother they have lost . . .

Oh, if only I may be able to write it as I conceive it, how great and noble a book it will be! I must live to write it, I must, I *must*, I MUST. I have just looked out of my doorway, the stars are brilliant, the new moon curved, night hammered, wrought from silver. I dare not look too long at this beauty; I grow too restless; I must work.

I closed the journal, and went on with my book. I was surprised that Julian came home so early, until realising it was a quarter past ten, and I had written five thousand words in four hours. My right hand was painful with cramp, my feet were cold, my back ached when straightened, but how jubilant I felt! Julian glowered at me from the doorway, grunting as he stood there hands in pockets, chin sunken in his fur coat, scowling terrifically. I didn't care. I felt fine, and pushed past him to take deep breaths of the starry air. I knew he was thinking of how he might taunt me.

"Huh!" was all he could say, when I came into the kitchen again. "Huh!"

"How nice of you to call," I said, imitating his father's voice and stare.

"Oh well," replied Julian, with self-satisfaction, making a sort of deep good-humoured growl in his throat. "You, I perceive, are your old self, Maître! Good for you!"

"I've written a marvellous chapter!" I cried. Dare I ask to read it to him? The last time I had read to him, a poem of Francis Thompson's, he had snorted contemptuously when I had mis-read *gonfalons* as *gonfalcons*.

"And you want to read it to me, Maître? Well, old boy," he growled, benevolently, "you shall read it to me. You have a good voice sometimes when you're coming out of yourself. You're two distinct personalities, you know, Maître?"

"I'd rather you read it yourself," I said, to please him.

"As you wish, Maître. May I offer you a drink?" He lugged a flagon from his pocket. We drank from the bottle. Recklessly I threw the best part of a sackful of wood on the fire.

We ate bread, cheese, and pickled onions; and then Julian read what I had written. He read slowly and distinctly; frequently he chuckled, sometimes he hit his thigh with his right hand as he rolled his head with laughter. "It's frightfully good! It's as good as Kipling! It's better than Kipling!" I felt I liked Julian terrifically. With amusement I heard my neighbour moving in her coal-house, as she listened through the mousehole in the thin lath-and-plaster that separated our two kitchens.

We finished the beer, and afterwards went for a short walk, while Julian told me more of his adventures in London during and immediately after the War. They were most amusing, and I begged him to write a book about them. That night it seemed unnecessary to undress, so we slept in our clothes; and although he slept first, I did not mind his snores. We were up at seven-thirty in the morning, and while he swished the lime-ash floor with water and mop, I made the fire and boiled the porridge in one of our new double-cookers. The eggs-and-bacon were excellent, and we threw the rind to the old cattle dog, who was just bold enough to come inside for the tit-bits. He snapped them up, and fled silently, tail down.

"This is the life," said Julian, wiping his lips rapidly on the

back of his hand, and becoming intent again on Rousseau's *Confessions*. My admiration for Compton Mackenzie's style and wit deepened as I read more of *Sinister Street*.

Julian and I washed up the breakfast things, putting them in the top shelf of what we called the dresser. This dresser was made of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch tongued-and-grooved deal board, and was merely a big weak box 2 yards long, 1 yard deep, 1 yard wide, laid on its side. There were two shelves, protected by curtains of cotton print. It was rectangular in shape; but if one leaned one's weight on the end, it became a parallelogram, and the shelves, with their loads of crockery, boots, books, and jampots, were liable to fall aslant.

Afterwards I sat down at the table to write. Julian also sat down to write. He would, he said, revise his translation of Catullus. I began my chapter deliberately, writing slowly and preciously, forcing the words. From the corner of my eye I could see that Julian's face had assumed its Beethoven scowl as he fixed his eyes on the typescript. I crossed out what I had written. It was aimless, leading nowhere, a description of football boots in an untidy row. I waited for an idea. Julian also was sitting very still.

"Harry," he spoke suddenly, subduedly. "I wonder, old boy—no, I don't think I should—oh damn. Harry, may I read you some of my stuff?"

"I'd love to hear it."

In a deep, forceful voice Julian read his translation. He pronounced every word most distinctly, but without variation in tone. After two lines I found that my mind had switched itself from my hearing. He went on, his voice earnest, deep, and rasping distinctly. I looked, while endeavouring to conceal my look, to see how many more unread pages lay before him. Surreptitiously I looked at some notes made the day before, about a boy in the village who "titted" (knocked) the hats off the other children going into Sunday school; who threw milk at Bessie Carter in her dairy behind the latchet window beyond Revvy's cottage; who found an old watch in an ash heap and took it to the blacksmith to be repaired. And what Mrs. Carter had told me, of a young married woman "eating fruit in a haphazard way", sure sign of pregnancy. This woman took tomatoes from the village shop, stealthily; and the owner of the shop, under-

standing, had been nice about it. A thatcher told me that he stood on a sort of small ladder, held to the thatch by steel prongs, called the "standing-bittle", lest his foot "brit" the reed, and it "rat" (rot). An eighty-year-old man, annoyed because his neighbour stood on a ladder just inside his garden, without permission, had rushed out crying, "If thee't a man, put thee dooks up." The neighbour, a cobbler, was a chapel-man, and refused to fight. A big woman weighing eighteen stone, mother of several children, living in a village some miles away, went to the doctor, complaining of a pain. She thought it was due to green rhubarb, eaten too early. A 7-lb. baby was born two hours later, to the complete surprise of both its parents. That was during the War; the child now answered to the name of Rhubarb.

"Well, Maître, is it any good?" Julian was asking anxiously.

"Damned good, Julian! It's easily the best I've ever heard."

"Huh!"

"I say, do you mind not biting your nails? Forgive me asking you again—but you did ask me to tell you——"

Instantly he hid his hand under the table. I felt awfully like the governess he had told me about.

"Of course I haven't heard many translations of Catullus, but I like it, Julian, I like it. Revision will only mean an alternative rendering, I suppose? You should write original verse."

"I have."

He looked at me suspiciously. The middle finger-tip of his left hand sought his mouth, and was again hidden under the table.

"Well, I suppose I must get on with these confounded pissen-lit days. By the way, I wonder if you'd mind standing by the stream when you come home at night, and not against our door-post. I know it's a village custom—our neighbours practise it regularly on their doorstep—but if you don't mind——"

Julian went upstairs to continue his work. His footfalls were loud as he paced to and fro overhead. Flakes of lime-wash fell from the ceiling floor-boards. Soon he came down the worm-eaten stairs, and tiptoed across to the door.

"I think I'll go for a walk, Maître, and leave you to it. I'll be back for lunch at one-thirty. Can I buy anything for you?"

"No thanks. If you see the butcher, you might strafe him for sending seven pounds of mutton scrag when I ordered only two. Tell him I won't pay for more than two."

"I think I'll leave that to you. I really don't care how much scrag the wretched fellow sends," replied Julian, gnawing two fingers at once. "By the way, has Father sent——"

"Yes. There's about eighteen bob over from last week. Shall I pay the Higher House for you? I don't think you ought to keep a score up there, Julian. It's only laying up trouble."

"Very well, let me settle up with him. It's only about ten bob. Can you let me have it now?"

Reluctantly I gave him one of the four red ten-shilling notes received by post from his father that morning. Then I settled down to work. It was difficult to work. Only in the evening, after dimpsy or owl-light, did the true flow begin. Then there was the lunch to prepare. Potatoes, onions, carrots went into the larger of my two double-cookers, with the remains of rabbit stew, crusts, sausages, and hunks of scrag that I cut with my axe on the chopping block. A handful of pearl barley, and some water; shoved on the fire, it would cook itself.

Julian came home thirty-five minutes late for lunch, arrogant and happy. "All in the pot is yours," I said, taking my hazel thumb-stick. "I'm going for a walk. See you sometime."

"That's fine, old boy. I shall begin my 'Ode to Swinburne' when I've washed up."

At half-past six o'clock, when I returned, the door was shut. A cat jumped out of the window as I opened the door. The fire was out, the pot was on the table, rabbit and mutton bones were all on the floor. I persuaded the old cattle dog, which spent its life lying in the road outside its farm waiting to bark savagely at cows after their milking, to come in and clean up the bones. It cracked up a rabbit bone swiftly, grabbed a mouthful of others, dropped them, seized others, gulped a mutton bone, choked, and then, seeing that I intended neither to shout nor kick, settled down to a swift, uneasy prelude to indigestion.

After relighting the fire, clearing up, and eating my usual tea of bread and butter and marmalade, washed down by weak China tea from a quart jug, I got my journal from the uniform case, and prepared to enjoy communion with it. My pen scratched over the paper rapidly, describing the walk of that afternoon.

March 27. This north coast of Devon, just above the waters of the Two Rivers mated in their restless love by the sea, is glorious,

even when it rains. It is so big and generous. Today I wandered over the sand-hills, where Barbellion used to roam, watching the lapwings and the drifting mists. It is full of romance. I realised I was still as in boyhood, joying greatly in all wild places. When a straw-mottled owl flapped up in silence from some reeds, I cried aloud with happiness. *Ah, I thought, I will come here later on and find his nest. Oh, ecstasy, I have never found a short-ear'd owl's nest before. What will "Bony" at school and Rupert Bryers say?* I remembered, with an aching feeling for Time gone for ever and for ever, that I was twenty-four; that dear tall old "Bony" had not come back from a reconnaissance patrol, that Rupert, the gentle eye'd, fell in the second battle of Ypres.

Today I walked alone round the headland, watching the gulls, and much happiness was there through my eyes. A raven sat on a scaur of rock and watched me, and I watched him through the zeiss glass that I took from a dugout somewhere near Bullecourt, nearly four years ago. Four years ago! Then, instead of the evening star gleaming on the ocean-bed of sky when the tidal light of day had ebbed, the calcium flares arose into the darkness and with tremulous brilliance wavered to earth. Sometimes the pop-pop-pop of a machine-gun traversing to catch reliefs floundering and cursing in the mud, and the hissing whine of gas-shells came when it was quiet. One night I left the mess and walked beyond the village of Mory, and looked out over towards Cambrai. The Germans had retreated into their *Siegfried Stellung* a few days before. Ruddy and sudden fountains of light where shells were bursting a mile away, the high far throb of a twin-engined Gotha and the white flares diminishing north and south, yet rising everlastingly. I sat there for hours, held by the unrealisable aching vastness of the scene. Pin pricks of light over the distant trenches, faint *wumps!*, the oval instant belch of howitzers in a quarry near me; the Hun high shrapnel, the bursting of his, or our, H.E., the bright smack-back of our howitzers pointing stunted barrels at the unthinkable stars. Sometimes as I watched a silence would hover over the battlefield like a kindly bird; and then nearer sounds would be borne up; the laughter of gunner officers in the "mess" made of canvas and splintered willow-sticks, the nasal shout of some cockney soldier washing up in a lean-to, the needle-squeaks of mice running through the clover at my feet, the rustle of a leaf, the rattle of a head-chain, the

stamp of a mule. And in the dark solitude I would shiver and hug myself—and then the air would leap alight and rock and thunder, orange, vermillion, and white flashes and stabs, the long white stabs of the 18-pounders, red and green S.O.S. rockets soar above the German positions, the shattering bullet-fans of their machine-guns traverse the low darkness. Another raid, held up by their wire-belts; barrage and counter barrage. It was a strange earth, to which I could never accustom myself; and now it is gone as strangely.

Today I watched through my zeiss glass the peregrines flying swiftly above the Point, stooping with mighty rushes at one another, touching in the air, kissing with their shrill spring chatter of joy, wings buffeting or embracing. I hoped to see a stoop at a gull, but nothing happened, except that an occasional gull pursued one, but was easily out-flown. The stoop, or dive, of the falcon is magnificent. They shut their wings and dive head-first at so steep an angle that it appears to be a perpendicular drop. It is not a swooping down, but a complete drop, as though freed from the force of gravity in a vacuum; a compression of sinew, muscle, bone and feather. I estimated the accumulated speed just before flattening out and zooming to be quite 200 m.p.h.

I saw a pair of swallows, a solitary pair. They are at least three weeks early. Wheatears have come; pipits are "fetching down song from heaven". Cormorants on the rocks below hold their umbrella-segment wings outstretched, to ease the wedgement of fish in their gullets; and to dry those wings. All mammals and birds like the warmth of the sun, I with them.

Having read through, and much enjoyed, what I had written in my journal, I went on with my book. About two thousand words had flowed when I heard Julian's footfalls coming nearer.

"There's a dance in the next village, Maitre, and I suggest we both go," he said through the open window. "And I've a surprise for you. To whom do you think I have been talking in the pub? Why, the man who read and accepted your book! Indeed, I've had a most curious conversation with Mr. J. D. Beresford. I said, 'Oh, then you know old Harry—Henry Williamson, my friend, whose first novel you recently read for Collins. He's only a few yards away, writing the sequel to that

masterpiece of imitation and inexperience.' I'm ragging you, of course, Maître. The gentleman's reaction was most amusing. 'As a matter of fact, old boy,' he replied with almost unseemly haste, 'since a toss I took in the hunting field six months ago, my memory has been liable to go phut any moment. That's why I'm down here in Devon, doctor's orders, old boy, recuperation, you know. And keep my incognito, old boy, I don't want it to be known in the very least, don't you know, that I'm J. D. Beresford, old boy, author of the Jacob Stahl trilogy. Everyone calls me Porky.'" Julian laughed. "Porky!"

"What's he like?" I asked.

"A medium-sized man, with Alpine-shaped head, protruding eyes, buck teeth, Charlie Chaplin moustache, and eyebrows like perpetual interrogation marks. A complete extravert—in fact, inside out."

"Well, J. D. Beresford must have disguised himself effectively from a long-headed Nordic type. I really don't want to meet this new incarnation."

"Oh, he's an amusing enough fellow, Maître. His one idea is to make as many people as possible tight in the shortest possible time. By God, Maître, I like the swirl and interplay of human life! I'm damned glad I came down here! It's a great place! Come along, you must come to the dance. Away with introspection and lunar landscapes!"

I looked at Julian's face with disfavour. He had broken into my work. I did not want to prop up a bar and hear silly talk and swallow cold beer. It gave me indigestion. I was still afraid of a repetition of my collapse at a cinema six months before.

But it seemed impossible to work now that Julian had broken into my mood. Even so, it might be fun at the dance. But I swore I would drink only tea or lemonade. I put on an old Homburg hat, decorated with shot-holes from my gun. Julian and I, going after rabbits, had seen none, so we had amused ourselves shooting at my hat flung in the air. I stroked my growing beard, and seized my ash thumb-stick. My mackintosh cape hung on the nail in the flimsy staircase door, made of the cheapest wood and painted with the cheapest paint in the world, putty-coloured. Fastening the cape—surplus disposal board cavalry cape—over my shoulders, I hastened after Julian into the cloudy starlight, and took deep breaths of the cool air.

A large oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling of the Social Club Room shed its dusky yellow light on the red faces of the dancers. Older people sat sedately on forms and chairs round the walls. The Lancers was being danced; the dust arose with occasional laughing shrieks of girls. At one end of the room a youth with long hair thumped out music from a piano with yellow keys, at the other a trestle table was laden with cream and jam cut-rounds, cakes, bottles of lemonade, a tea urn, and a plate with coppers and some small silver lying in it.

I felt disappointment that there was no band, with flute, fiddle, and old-fashioned serpent, as in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. No matter: outside, below the wooden steps and across the stream, two ponies were tethered to the iron ring in the wall of the inn. This was the real countryside, remote from the coils and intercoils of civilisation—motor cars, pavements, fogs which wasted human life. I saw grins, I heard a titter; and pretending to be unaware of them by a casual scrutiny of faces, I went outside, to find old Julian.

On the top of the steps a shortish man nearly bumped into me. He greeted me in the friendliest way, taking my hand and shaking it hard, while exclaiming, "Hullo, old boy, how are you? Answer's a lemon, what? What? Laugh and the world laughs with you. Come and have a drink! What, you don't want one! Oh rot, my dear fellow! Weep, and you weep alone! Go to blazes, go on! Come on, my dear fellow, over the road and have one!"

We entered the bar crowded with men, smoke, loud talk, lit by two oil-lamps. My new acquaintance, who was clad in a check suit of horsey cut, pushed a way through to the bar, greeting many faces, and being greeted with respectful good-fellowship. He called loudly for a pint of beer for me, a double whiskey for himself, and a pint of beer for everyone in the room. In one corner I saw Julian's flushed face, as he talked proudly to several intently listening men.

"Good health!" I raised the glass, and sipped.

"Good luck, old boy, jolly good luck!" gabbled my new friend. Julian's description fitted him! buck teeth, bushy black query eyebrows, and a moustache nearly pared to his nostrils,

except for spikes of waxed hair which stuck up like the horns of a goat.

"You must shave, old boy," he burred. "Of course you must! Goo' Lor' yes. Can't allow you to run about like this, of course not. What, a young chap like you with a long brown beard! To blazes with the idea! Have another, drink up, get on with the good work! Oh rot, you haven't got dyspepsia! Rot, I'm over fifty, dear boy, and have had three wives, and I haven't had a day's dyspepsia! Look at me. My motto is, Laugh and the world laughs with you. Goo' Lor', yes! Every time a coconut! Come on, drinks all round, landlord, fill up their glasses like blazes! You're an author!" he yelled through the din at me.

"I try to be," I said modestly.

"Well, no harm in trying, dear boy. None at all, Goo' Lor' no. Do you write under your own name? My writing name is not my real name, of course. Goo' Lor' no. I'm a man of multiple personality. Goo' Lor' yes. Every time."

After a glance at my downcast gaze, he poured a double whiskey down his throat, and ordered another. "Naughty boy!" he said playfully. "Telling your friend that you knew J. D. Beresford, and that he had read your book! However, I bear no malice, laugh and the world laughs with you, ol' boy. I'll gladly help you if I can. Of course I can, gooloryes. Call me Porky, dear boy—that's my nickname. Forget all about my being a writer. I don't want it known—goolorno. Reminds me of my toss in the huntin' field. Lost my memory, gooloryes. I talk a lot of nonsense, you know, you mustn't let it worry you, goolorno! Keep the secret, old boy. Go to blazes, of course you will—landlord, another pint. A young chap like you, too! Shave, dear boy, shave! Mustn't run wild, you know! Goolorno."

After awhile I extricated myself, leaving the bar while my host was greeting someone else. Looking back, I saw a horny hand about to grasp my half empty pint glass. Entering the dance room as a shrill whistle pierced the noise, I observed a little man in a blue suit stalking up and down the floor. He blew the whistle again, and cried sternly, "Take your partners for the Waltz!" returning to his seat importantly as the piano thumping restarted.

I recognised a village girl sitting by the wall, and went to her. The summer before I had spent a fortnight of June in my cottage, with a man whose acquaintance I had made in the gallery of the

Opera House in Covent Garden. Jack had come by train, I on the Norton. It had been a good fortnight, much walking, friendly talking about music, literature, and Bohemian London life. I admired his kindly outlook, his good humour, his feeling for Wagner, Delius, and Debussy. He had first told me that Delius was a genius akin to Jefferies; and we had listened to *A Village Romeo and Juliet* together, in the gods, agreeing in the interval that it was a most beautiful poem, too good for the mob. Only in one thing had I felt apart from him: in his perpetual desire to find women. "I'm sex-mad," he told me several times. "Let's go and find some girls today," he often said. "You don't want to, do you? All right, we'll go for another long walk. After all, it was most sporting of you to ask me down here. You're a poet, all sublimation. I used to be like that once," he sighed. Then he would wave his arms as though he were conducting an orchestra, and hum through his nose music from Puccini or Wagner, afterwards examining his face carefully in the one small mirror of the cottage, and plucking hairs from his nostrils. One afternoon, crossing the sand-hills, we met two girls, one of them about eighteen and not pretty, the other younger, with a small, sweet face, and pigtail tied with green ribbon. She was called Dora. We spoke; and I attached myself to Dora. After awhile the other two were kissing and laughing beside us on the slope of sand and marram grass, and Dora and I went away, looking at the burnet roses, mulleins, and vipers' bugloss which grew on the level ground near the winding stream. I told her about Jefferies, and she told me that they used to learn wildflowers in school, but she did not know many names.

Now in the village room she recognised me, and I asked her to dance. I apologised several times for the clumsiness of my nailed shoes. I told her about the owls, and how I cooked in the excellent double-cookers, shooting a rabbit here and there to add to the pot; and Dora said if I wanted eggs I could always get some at her father's farm under market price: they were getting eightpence a dozen from the dealers, and I needn't pay more. After the dance, which ended at midnight, I walked down the village street with her, saying goodnight at the wooden foot-bridge which led by a back way into the farmhouse.

I saw my new acquaintance Porky many times during the following weeks of rain and bright warmth and swallows wind-

ing about in blue skies. Very soon he had refused to have Julian in the furnished cottage on the Bay which he rented for £1 a week. Julian spoke with equal contempt of Porky. Certainly I found Porky at times equally as difficult as Julian. At these times Porky spoke rapidly, disconnectedly, intolerantly, breaking down every remark I tried to make. I imagined that a sensitive and perhaps repressed childhood had caused him to boast, as a compensation, when he felt free among strangers. But his manner then was tiring, for underneath his Bohemian camaraderie he had a limited suburban outlook. "Rot, my dear boy, rot! I was a commandant of a prisoners' War camp in Wales for three years, and you're talking rot, utter rot! No prisoners were killed after surrendering in battle!" Another time he was a colonel of hussars. Also he had been in the workhouse for three weeks "on principle" (this to confound a remark I made about the benevolence of the Old Age Pension). He had trained four Dartmoor *grey* ponies and sold them "to the then Mrs. Harmsworth" (this when I had told him how Lord Northcliffe had disliked the Sunday paper on which I had worked). He declared that he had been the Master of many packs of foxhounds. I could not say anything without Porky either capping it scornfully or dismissing it contemptuously. When not disintegrating thus he would urge me to drink up and get married, "get on with the goo' work, dear boy, get on with the goo' work like blazes"; quoting his own record and age as a counter-example to my solitary living. Soon his wife would "present him with another. She's twenty-four, and I'm fifty-one—I get on with the goo' work, goolories."

In the cottage where once he invited me to supper, his wife, a gentle quiet woman, seemed perpetually anxious about him. The cottage was filled with dogs, which loved him. Any stray found a home with Porky; he was generous and kind to children, too. I liked him for it; and in my liking, I foolishly tried to give him advice about his generosity at the inn; he snapped his fingers at me. "You're only a boy, my dear fellow, only a boy." Porky would hire a car, and drive around the coast, to Morte, Combe, and even so far as Lynton, stopping at a pub, paying for drinks all round, and then cashing a cheque. I went with him once, torn from my evening warm brooding over my book. Julian came too: he and Porky quarrelled; a miserable, worthless evening.

Nightly, the popular and lavish Porky, with dogs and check suit, was followed into the inns, which were crowded. He was said to be a millionaire, brother to a well-known racing man, whose name was spelt almost like his own. Village folk, I noticed, disregarded spelling: there were three brothers in the village, each spelling his name differently: Zeal, Zeale and Zeel.

The remarkable hospitality stopped abruptly. One morning I left Porky in his cottage trembling, sober, silent, reading a copy of *Home Notes*. There were rumours of scenes in the inn, of beer having been thrown in Porky's face. The policeman was seen to call at the cottage. The servant girl gave notice. Porky sat grey and shaky, quietly smoking tea-leaves in his pipe. The cottage was acrid with smoke, his wife's eyes red with weeping.

They had a boy with them, child of a former wife, and a little blue-eyed girl who sucked her thumb and stared at me whenever I appeared at the cottage. They had no food, no milk for the little girl, so I lent the wife money to pay baker and milkman. Secretly I handed several pound notes to her, all I had. That evening Porky hailed me jovially from the doorway of *The Carter's Arms*. The coal strike crisis was at its height. Porky began calling me a "damned miner" because I did not agree with his remedy for the crisis, which was to "shoot every damn miner and then send the rest back to work". He grew furious as he declaimed against the miners' leaders; he would "tear their intestines out, wind them round their necks, stamp on them, and grind them into the dust". I wanted to leave; but the pint on the counter had to be swallowed first.

"Wouldn't you explore every avenue before shooting them? with your hand to the ploughshare? Steering a middle course? And leave no stone unturned?" asked Julian, derisively. He was sardonic and sober: I doled his allowance in shillings nowadays.

"Grrr!" replied Porky. "Grrr! Don't you dare to talk to me, you damned no-good fellow!" Rapidly he twirled the goat-horns of his moustache. "Grrr!"

"By God, your insolence is intolerable!" replied Julian. "And to think that it was to preserve your type of mentality that we went through the War."

"Grrr!" cried Porky, waving his stick in the air. "Who cares about your tinpot little war? You're only a boy, a mere boy, a damned boy, get on with it, goo' work, gooloryes, ans' lemon,

every time. I saw *real* fighting, yes I did, at Rorke's Drift, dear boy!" Fiercely he twisted his waxed lip-horns. "Gooloryes!"

"Rorke's Drift?" retorted Julian. "Are you sure it wasn't a walking-on part in Chu Chin Chow?" He went out of *The Carter's Arms*.

"Come on, dear boy, forget that no-good fellow," chirruped Porky. "Drink up, everytime! Have a pint! Have two pints! Empty the damned barrel, gooloryes!"

I made an excuse, and went away. For two days I avoided the cottage, for I could do nothing, having no more money to give; then, going on the Norton to the market town, to my amazement I saw Porky in new hat and overcoat and gloves, sitting resplendently with his family in a hired Ford car. He waved me the cheeriest greetings. He was a family man, the man I liked; the kind and tender-hearted father, giving a warmth which made me happy. The car was packed with furniture, food, coal, and gramophone records. The driver, a local lad, grinned at me. The next evening Porky was in the pub again, with pocketfuls of money, standing drinks all round on a cash basis, reiterating his favourite quotation from Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and that the answer to all problems was a lemon. He had called on the parson to return a hundredweight of coal, driving a ramshackle cart with a white horse. Horse and cart were outside, tied to the iron ring by the step. He declared I must be the godfather of his forthcoming child. He would hear of no modest disclaimer, that I would be a poor godparent—"Rot, my dear boy, get on with the goo' work, like blazes!" At eight o'clock he insisted on taking Julian and me for a ride in the cart, which had no lights, but the moon was shining clear.

Down the narrow lanes we trotted. "Get on with the goo' work, get on with it, *Dammit!*" cried Porky, standing up in the cart, and wielding a dung-crust ed whip. The horse immediately bolted. Round the corners we whirled. I began laughing. It seemed so funny. "Laugh and the wheels whirl with you," I shouted in Julian's ear. "There's a big bend in front!" Behind us a boy on a bicycle was yelling something. We could not hear, but managed to pull up before the bend in the road. The boy's bicycle had no brakes, he hit our tailboard, pitched into the cart, picked himself up, gasped out that if we weren't careful we should have an accident with Feyther's horse and butt, retrieved

his bicycle and followed slowly, rising and falling and twanging on an acorn-shaped front wheel.

"Get on wi' it, get on with the goo' work, go-r-r-r-n"—to the mare—"go like blazes, my dear girl, get on with it." With finger and thumb Porky rapidly screwed up his goat-horn moustaches.

"To hell with this as transport! Laugh and the wheels whirl with you, certainly: but whip, and you whip alone! I'm getting out."

"Goddammit, my dear boy. Show white feather, goolorno! Grrr! Why, bless my soul, Extinguished Service Order, Military Cross, Blue Snake of Liberia, Old Horse of Halifax, or whatever those tin things you wore at the memorial service were, dammit, and you're frightened of a trotting pony! You, a young knight of the air! Goolor, laugh, dear boy, laugh—answer's a lemon every time—grrr!" He whipped the horse across the hip.

We rattled forward, and soon were in a canter. Julian and I hung on, ready to jump as we serpentine down the lane. We were first on one wheel, then on the other. I was now alarmed. Somehow we arrived at the village; we pulled up, and went into the inn. My legs were shaky. The landlord was smiling. His cheque had been "put right" with another, larger cheque, and a fiver thrown in for luck. The landlord's plump wife was haughty. "Oh yes, Mr. Tanberry has always been as proper a gentleman in this house as ever pulled at a pint," she remarked to me, adding significantly, "Whatever his fair-weather friends may choose to say about Mr. Tanberry."

Once had I suggested to her, in the days of tea-smoking crisis, that it might be wise to discourage Mr. Tanberry's excessive generosity.

"Yes," she added, with a more deliberate significance, "And some people, who pretends to be his friends, and drinks with him, don't spend in a year in this house what this proper gennul-man spends in half an hour!"

This implication was distressing, but I did not know what to reply. I was beginning to experience a dark feeling in the village, of un-understanding. Someone, when I had taken some food and milk recently to Porky's cottage, had cut the tyres of the Norton left in the lane outside.

"Drinks all round, get on with it, you boys, drink up and have another!"

Porky stood nine rounds by closing time, and by then he and

Julian were despising one another. There were twelve men in the bar. Porky went out into the darkness, amidst cheers, missed the way, and fell into the stream, which ran beside the narrow lane, and below it, without a wall. Porky was dragged out, teeth chattering, face peaky and large nose red in the moonlight. "Getting on with the goo' work," he gibbered, making light of his fall. "Gooloryes." By this act he became, by tradition, the Mayor of the village. The office, I learned, would be held by him until someone else fell in the stream. It was a clear stream in those days, and though small and shallow, was full of large trout. Later it became polluted with the coming of hundreds, thousands of summer visitors; but by that time Porky had gone, and was but a memory, in a few minds, "a wonnerful generous gennulman".

9

Meanwhile I went to see Dora at her father's farm. I went to buy eggs there. Each of the two pockets of my service tunic held a dozen eggs, which were brought back to the cottage unbroken. The auction of lots of wood from the "wrecking" was held in one of the fields by the farm. Six out-of-work men were partners in buying, breaking up, and selling the wood. I bought two posts of teak about seven feet long and a foot square, for £1. This was more than others had paid; but I was too timid to bid during the auction, and accepted the price afterwards, for this unsold lot, without bargaining. I had long perceived this inability to assert myself, to say what I thought was right or fair, to be the cause of much of my past unhappiness; yet the inability, or impotence, remained. I blamed my schooling for this; together with the excessive love and protection given me by my mother, as a boy, and the constant fear of my father when at home. As Julian declared, I was still adolescent—"that uneasy period between puberty and adultery", as he said once.

An amount of wood for which others had paid about six shillings was mine for twenty. I paid another five shillings to have it carted to my cottage and tipped over the garden wall beside the scraggy currant bushes and patch of rising nettles.

Dora told me I had paid far too much for the wood. She was indignant. "You look out for yourself, Mr. Williamson. No one else will if you don't."

Our eyes met; our eyes fell. Faint colour came in Dora's cheeks. She was sweet. She looked sweet in her simple clothes, sitting by the open hearth of the farmhouse; her slender legs with big muddy boots, her hands, already rough with work, folded as though with resignation on her apron. Dora was like her mother, who was not very strong, a sensitive, quiet, soft-voiced woman with brown eyes. In the kitchen was a long table where the blue-eyed farmer and his blue-eyed sons, and their hired man, sat down to eat. The date 1625 was above the chimney piece.

A cat was asleep on the sofa, a shaggy bullock dog on the hearth. Three chickens chased a spider in one corner. I sat by the fire, in the best chair, fetched from the parlour. A lamb trotted about the room, following Dora, who usually fed it with a bottle. The ewe had "turned against it", said Dora. That morning they had cut off its tail, and its quarters were bloody. I sat by the fire, having been invited to tea. Dora disappeared. Thumping of feet overhead told me she was changing her clothes. Soon she came downstairs, smiling, faintly flushed, and told me that tea wouldn't be long. She was dressed in a green jersey, and wore underneath a pair of stays in which her slimness was lost. The very obtrusive stays might have been a gift from her elder married sister, whose husband had been killed in the War.

"Nice li'l maid," my neighbour Revvy had said to me. "Proper little maid her be, a heart of gold, and a good worker." I was delighted at her intelligence, and wanted to lend her some books of Jefferies. Then for some reason her face reddened, and she seemed unhappy; and following her glance, I saw she was looking, anxious and ashamed, at the lamb with the bloody tail stump. "Dearie me, oh look at thaccy now. Get on out, you dirty little bitch!"

I was given tea in the parlour, by myself, while the others sat at the long table in the kitchen and were unnaturally quiet. Had the sensitive mother observed my face when Dora had come downstairs, and again when she had rated the lamb? The word *bitch* was not then in general use as a term of condemnation; but when I did hear it used among men, I always winced within myself. No doubt I was excessively genteel in these things; but

the hardness in the use of the word was what checked me. Dora had used the word to the wounded lamb naturally, unthinkingly, and yet I could not help a feeling of mortification because she had spoken like that; and so, because I had felt like that, I was checked; Dora had caught my feeling; and now the gossamers were snapped between us. I set out to call at the farmhouse once or twice again, but when I got there I felt uneasy with myself, and went onwards to the headland, keeping in my pocket the copy of *The Saturday Review* I had meant to show her, with an essay called *Spring in a Devon Village*, which Gerald Barry the Editor had accepted. I had met him at the first night of Compton Mackenzie's play *Columbine*, in a South London theatre, where by chance we had sat side by side, and in the intervals talked enthusiastically about Jefferies and Wiltshire. He told me he had just come to London, and was living in lodgings, while learning Journalism.

I went through the lanes, and up the south side of the headland, the paper in my pocket, beside my notebook. Spring was rushing fast over the West Country on the west wind. The black-thorn was out, dog violets blooming, celandines fading, magpie nests nearly topped with thorns, ravens were sitting. I lay happily in the sunshine above the grey-green seas rolling in from the Atlantic.

Upon the green nettles under the dry-ditched wall the spotted vermilion shield of the ladybird shone as it crawled in search of a mate; the pleading note of the greenfinch was sad as though with long-drawn doubt and hopeless love.

Over the precipice of the Point the gulls soared, glided, threw up and fell crook-winged, blaking, crying, gabbling, hanging in the upblast of wind a few yards from my face, yellow-eyed and wind-ruffled. Daws winged their speedy blackness down the wind, shooting down and checking uneasily; buzzards sailed high in sweeping leisure—look! Shaftless arrowheads of iron aloft, black-stars of the day,—falcons cutting into the wind. The wings were bent back, the head blunt, the tail thick, short, and stocky. Whereas the kestrel remained poised in a fair wind by delicate balance and by *leaning*, the peregrine falcon *cut* its hover by suppressed force. A tiny finch came from over the streaky, smashing sea, a frail brown mite, fluttering frailly to reach shore and sanctuary: one of the falcons saw it, tipped up and shot

down in sagittate blackness, and *missed*. I was terribly afraid, as though the finch were me. The larger female then stooped; she too missed. They did not pursue the struggling speck further, relying on the first colossal dive to break and take their prey; their speed carried them far below the finch, and in a second or two they had shot up without wingbeat to their pitches a thousand feet above the sea. They zoomed up as though shot from an invisible gun: the gun of the booming wind, which buffeted me and tried to lift my eyelashes and sprayed salt on my lips, as I wrote in my notebook.

Flower life had a hard struggle there. All blossoms were dwarfed. An elderberry on the north side of the headland looked bleak and dead, although its buds were opening. Every winter the tree nearly died, every summer it just survived, and so life went on. Only the furze, close-packed and stunted, seemed able to defy the wind and driven spray; and now its bushes were heavily aswarm with gold bees of blossom.

These facts I wrote in my book, ending with a confession, as to a dear friend—indeed, my writing at that time was my friend: it was something very near to me, and yet apart from me. When I read it to myself, it was never as something I had written, but something of the life of truth.

This was the confession:—

I see so much, love so much, feel so free and *without care*; I can write not a tithe of my joy in the country; words are feeble; no writing can recreate the thoughts these things give.

My solitary pair of swallows is still here. Soon April, and Spica's birthday; I have written many letters, and torn them all up: no more unwanted affection shall be thrust upon her. She writes no more to me. Fare thee well, Spica: for me the twilight of dream.

*Journeying my journey bare
Five suns, except of the all-kissing sun
Unkissed of one.*

Putting pen and book in my pocket, I lay back on the turf, closed my eyes, and let the sunshine fill my head.

Stroking my soft beard, the dark brown hairs of which were turning fair with the bleaching of the May sun, I sat staring at the latest entry in my diary. Actually I was listening to the intermittent beating of my heart: was it valvular disease, or indigestion? I felt weak when I got up suddenly, to test my heart. Ten o'clock had just struck, the world was darkening, the village was silent. I was dreading the return of Julian. Nowadays it was difficult to talk to him. Occasionally the nights had been tolerable: Julian in his bed reading by the light of a candle on his pillow, I in my bed reading also by candlelight, the door open between our rooms. Sometimes we would call out our pleasure or doubt in what we were reading.

"This long excrescence about 'Good-eggery' in '*Sinister Street*' is tedious, Harry. Also the 'moon-faced' warden—why always 'moon-faced'?"

"Hurry up with that volume, Julian. I like Swinburne's 'Swallow'. Also the 'Deserted Garden', and the 'Ode to Baudelaire'."

Gravely came the answer, "Oh yes, indeed. Swinburne is a very great poet."

To this no reply; we read on, hearing in the background of our relaxation the murmur of the stream, the wind in the elms, and the cries of owls. A thumping overhead, a series of soft thumps—the white owls were within a few feet of my head, I breathing deeply with contentment.

All that was spoiled now. Julian came for no more walks. Our evening literary discussions were ended. Seldom did we have a meal together. I felt it was my fault; but I did not know what to do. Julian was so persistent that I had yielded all his allowance to him, as soon as it came by weekly registered envelope. Nowadays his fingernails were bitten right down.

Stroking my beard, I read through what I had just written in the light of the candle, before he came back and the nightly disharmony began again.

8 May. Gerald Barry of *The Saturday Review*, writes, "You will do great things, I know. *The Lone Swallow*, which we will publish next week, is a glorious thing."

My writing of *Dandelion Days* is held up. Julian exhausts me.

Two days ago he went to the market town, and coming back in the miller's cart, quarrelled with him. The miller is about fifty, deaf, and, of course, did not reply to Julian's questions, but appeared to ignore them. There was a row of sorts; fists were used. Porky, too, is difficult: so I keep as much alone as possible. Nowhere do I meet anyone who has plain sight. Normal talk is impossible with any of the villagers; they simply don't understand a word I say. Julian says I am a paranoiac, a decadent, probably tubercular, an introvert, in fact, unnatural. There is some truth in that: often I think I am self-deluded. But always the sun and the elements make me buoyant again.

I am making bee-wine. Everyone in this district is making it. You put sugar in water in a glass jar in sunshine, and add the "bees", a sort of yeasty fungus which anyone will give you. They "work", rising with bubbles and sinking again: the liquid, after fermentation, is poured into earthenware jars, and corked up, with perhaps raisins or ginger. One glass makes a boy laugh, two glasses make a man silly, three are liable to make him lose his false teeth, his handsaw, and his woodstack. This is what happened to the "put thee dooks up if thee't a man" octogenarian yesterday. His teeth fell out, he mislaid his rusty saw, and someone pinched his wood.

I called in to see a retired shepherd, to ask about the falcons, and saw the bee-wine making on his window-sill. He gave me some of the "bees". He lived in a stone-floored cottage overlooking a green valley, with flaky lime-washed low ceiling, and wood-work painted blue, dulled by age. Photographs on the wall and mantelpiece of big-moustached, staring sons; and daughters with coiffures elaborately prepared for the event. A gun, with its owner's best hat, was laid on two nails in the ceiling beam.

The old housewife, with shining face, cuddled her elbows by the stove, on whose jet-black iron, saucepans were gently steaming. Two small casements let in the light, and on the window ledge seven jars of yellow liquid were bubbling. At a darkened table sat a woman of about thirty, with deep lustrous eyes and black hair, sewing. Her mouth was large but not heavy-lipped, mobile and "weak" (sensitive); her gaze at me, the visitor, was intense and just a little frightening. On the chair near the door sat a ruddy-faced labourer, clad in great boots and khaki trousers ruddled from the ironstone quarries wherein he worked. He

smoked a foul pipe which only partially obliterated his personal stink. Near him sat the shepherd, thin, grey-haired, the husband of the elbow-cuddling woman, and father of the young woman.

By the fire sat a thin little girl, shuffling and laying cards, and sometimes telling her granmer in a low soft voice that she has got "two jacks out together", or some lucky combination in her game of Patience. Her mouth was wider than her mother's, her eyes even larger, brown and untaught. She was illegitimate. Her mother obviously disliked her, and seldom missed an opportunity of saying a cutting thing to her. The little girl smiled to herself; a smile that belied the unwisdom of her lovely eyes. In the village she was said to be a "bitch". Although only thirteen years old, "boys" of eighteen or nineteen were, according to my neighbour, said to have had "dealings" with her. Granfer and granmer were supposedly ignorant of this.

Sometimes when I call in to sit and talk with the old man, she smiles at me, a sidelong smile—which is it, I wonder—of feminine lure so early, or shy unknowing liking, hesitant lest repulse be met in my glance?

On the subject of early "sexual-intercourse" (what a phrase!) someone in the pub the other day, a visitor, said they had a saying in the Southern States of America, *When you're old enough you're big enough, and when you're big enough you're old enough.* That seemed natural; that was natural; and yet something within me is mortified at the thought of this child. The repressions of upbringing? I had no such feelings when I was young: I looked upon the grown-up condemnation of such things as part of the ordinary normal thing called life, to be escaped by what was called, also by grown-ups, cunning and deception. I wanted to live my own self, in other words, and not their selves. Yet realising all this, why does the fact of a child of thirteen going with young men in the village make me slightly unhappy? Is it memory of war-time drunken harlots in Piccadilly, late at night? Surely not. Why, then?

Was it that it hurt me to think that such lovely eyes, brown, gentle, and tender, may become bewildered, then hard? Otherwise she is ugly, thin, starved-looking. Is it because Spica's eyes are also the eyes of this child?

I had just finished reading the above entry aloud to myself

when the door was shoved violently open. Julian, in his coat made of the skins of a bear, glowered there. I pretended to be writing, breathing deeply to ease the thumping of my heart.

"When a man talks to himself they say he is talking to the devil," the arrogant voice declaimed.

"The alternative is conversation with you."

"Huh!"

I looked coldly at him.

"Why you sit here night after night, writing and reading that balderdash, completely beats me," said Julian, advancing a pace, and thrusting his hands deeper into his pockets. He stared at me sulkily; then, with pretended concern, "You look pale, *petit maître*. Very pale. You're not going to have another collapse, I hope?"

Rage and despair made me arise and scream:

"You bloody swine!"

"Well, perhaps I am. But at least I enjoy myself."

"At other people's expense!" I stood up, clenching my hands.

"Certainly not at yours, old boy," he said, tolerantly and easily. "Forgive my mentioning it, but don't you owe me, or Father, quite a lot of money? Or are you content that he should support both of us? I refer, of course, to the balance of past remittances."

"You've had every penny!"

"I'll take your word for it. Forgive my base suspicions, *Maître*: I intended only to try and arouse you from your nocturnal and sepulchral self-immolation. Come, *Maître*, be a man! Admit that you're writing bosh! It *is* bosh! Who wants to read all that pissenlit nonsense? Oh yes, I know I laughed, but my God, one laughs at what a fellow says in the pub. That doesn't mean it's literature."

"Come on, let's hear some Swinburne, now we've decided to stay outside literature."

"What!" he cried. "Your impudence is intolerable, by God it is—it is, by God, it is——"

"Try 'unbearable' and give the top of your tongue a rest."

"Oh well, you'll be dead before long, old boy, so why should I bother to listen to your drivelling absurdities. Be careful old boy. You're not well, you know. Aren't you afraid your heart will suddenly——"

"You'll be dead too!" I screamed, and springing up, I rushed at him. The table canted up, and fell back. He struck out with his fists, and I knew he did not mean to strike me. Nor did I mean to hurt him, only to scare him, although I was desperately upset by my bumping heart. Gripping him round the waist, I swung him over my left thigh and threw him across the table. The candle fell, and went out. I stood still. He picked himself up. Urgently Revvy next door was calling down his wife into the coal cellar. I laughed hysterically.

"By God!" muttered Julian immediately, like a bear on four legs, "your insolence is intolerable, you long lean lounging fool! I would kill any other man for less than that! I am leaving at once!"

Striking a match, I sought and relit the candle. Julian went upstairs. I waited for him to pack, and went for a walk as far as the lych gate of the churchyard, and back again. There was much noise overhead; Julian was certainly packing. A few moments later there was a big bump on the floor, and then comparative quiet. Going upstairs, I saw he had lifted my bedding from the camp bed, and having thrown it on his bed, had fallen on top of the mass; and there he was, already snoring.

This put me in a real rage. I seized the iron tubing of the bed, and jerked it up violently. The ruddy, furry carcase bounced up and lolled with its head between wall and tip-tilted mattress. I shook the bed more violently, then with a jerking twist tossed the body with a crash on the floor. I seized the ewer, and poured cold water over his head. Then he sprang up with such rage on his face that my own rage changed to laughter, so I turned and ran away, banging the flimsy door in his face. The latch clicked. The next moment the door burst and splintered, and the camouflaged bear fell through. While it sprawled there I seized the other ewer from my washstand, emptied it over him, and ran downstairs, reaching the kitchen as the white ewer crashed into pieces at the foot of the stairs behind me.

That made me really angry. Smashing up my house like that! By God, I wouldn't stand that! As he came at me I rushed at him, while the rage on his face changed to alarm. He turned to run up the stairs. I seized his coat-skirt and pulled him over backwards. We fell together on the floor. I struggled up. As he clambered to his feet, I pushed him over again. He kicked me.

"You kicked me, did you, you bloody swine?" The five-gallon clome pitcher stood by the door, empty. I pretended to dash it at his head, but aimed at the lime-ash floor beside it. It shattered with a splaying crash. The handle remained in my hand. I flung it at the stove. Then I leaped upon the hairy body, seized it by the throat, and bumped its head on the floor. Julian lay unresisting. I got up. My 12-bore gun was on one of the dresser shelves: I slipped two cartridges into the breech, shouting with mock fury, "By God, Julian, your insolence is intolerable, so you're going a long journey now, old boy, all the way to Alger-non Charles Swinburne!", shut the breech, pushed forward the safety-catch, aimed the gun at the door of the coal-house, and pulled both triggers at once. The candle-light clapped out. My ears were ringing. Julian lay on the floor. Voices, whispers, foot-falls came subduedly through the opposite wall, where my neighbours were crouching, as in a box at the play.

"By God, you are against me, too!" muttered Julian, between sobs. "The world is against me—I can fight the world—but now you're against me—the only man I ever——"

He got up. I relit the candle. Two holes like big ink blots were in the putty-coloured door. He went upstairs. He packed his bag. He came down, and held out his hand.

"I'm going, Harry. I'm no good for you. I've known it for a long time, before, but hoped I might help you. Something in you seems dead, and in my rough way I wanted to resurrect it. Seriously, Harry, your apartness disturbs and even challenges all I believe to be vital and true in life. Am I boring you?"

This was a new Julian.

"No," I said, "you are speaking the truth."

"Hmph." He meditated. He should have been an actor. He had a presence. His head was held back, proudly. "What is Truth, indeed, Maître? As I see it, I have only hindered you. So I am going away, Harry. By God, I've only hindered you." He bit his lower lip, and blinked the tears from his eyes, before giving me a straight look, thrusting out hand and chin simultaneously, declaring:

"Good-bye, Harry! Keep my books in memory of me—if you care to remember me. I'm going."

"Where to?"

"Back to Father."

"Father *will* be pleased." I could not help laughing.

With no further word Julian went to the door, and walked away in the darkness. I could not believe that he had really gone. I felt sorry for him. I had been a poor companion, always self-absorbed, shutting myself away from him, completely selfish and egocentric. I recalled how many times Julian had, after the inevitable verbally truculent return at night, got up on the following morning to light the fire and swab out the kitchen; how he had been considerate and quiet-spoken at breakfast, afterwards tip-toeing around when he saw I was preparing to re-enter the world I was creating, in my imagination, for the dissolution of the old world. Poor old Julian, now he was gone, how empty my life in the cottage would be without him. I hastened up the village street. He was sitting on the stone step of the shut pub, but hearing me approach, he got up and walked towards me.

"I'm a damned fool, Maître," he laughed. "Of course I'm not going to London. I'm sorry for being such a bloody fool. Do you, er—would you object if I, er—slept in the cottage for one more night?"

"Certainly not. I'm sorry if I hurt your head."

"My dear fellow, it has survived many a worse crash than that on your comparatively soft floor, I do assure you, indeed."

We sorted out our bedding, and finally I went to sleep. In the morning Julian was tip-toeing around again. I could not stand this, so I told him I would do the work. That night he returned as before, and again on the following night. I went to see the landlord of the higher pub, a decent fellow, who said, "I don't very well like to refuse a gentleman, you see, zur. Yes, there is a bit owing, nearly nine pounds. He told me he received his allowance quarterly, zur. He's a wunnerfully interesting talker, if I may say so, zur. Us have never heard anything like it."

"How much does he drink in a day?"

"I don't take particular notice, zur, but just chalk it up as he calls for his pints. But three days ago I counted, out of interest. By eight o'clock he had thirty-two pints, that's including the midday of course. I didn't count particularly after eight o'clock; and he was the same when he went out as he was at the beginning. I've known a lot of beer to disappear at harvest time, in the old days, but I never knew anything like this. And as I

said, he be always the same—always polite and courteous to all he speaks to. A most interesting gennulman, zur, most wonderfully educated man, very interesting to listen to, and although I've heard tales about 'n, I must say, speaking as I find a man, that he has always behaved like a gennulman while in my house."

The next day Julian took his belongings down to a cottage in the lane called Zeale's, where he had arranged to lodge with a married couple. As there were only two bedrooms, and the second was already occupied by his host's brother, a stoker retired from the Royal Navy, Julian had to share a bed with "Sailor". "Sailor" received his pension at the beginning of every month; and during the first four days of every month he abandoned his work of quarrying stone, and was to be seen during opening time in one or another of the inns, a pint before him, his eyes with an ox-like stare, and his head nodding its ruffled mousey-coloured hair towards closing time at night. His ship had gone down in the battle of Jutland, and somehow he had been rescued, after a day and a night in the sea, covered with oil-fuel.

II

Every afternoon now I walked alone to the sands down the red sunken lane, with its plants and flowers, and ferns leaning from the banks and almost meeting in their profusion. On the sands it was rare to see footprints other than my own wandering from pool to rock, and by the edge of the glittering sea. My clothing was light: tunic, flannel shirt, and trousers tied up by string; and shoes without socks. It was a simple thing to cast these garments, and so be warmed by the simple truth of the sun. Sometimes a salmon leapt just beyond the foam-drag of toppling green waves. I floated in the glassy water, while the swell lifted me, murmuring in my ears; or I lay on the smooth sands of the wavelet's lapse; or impelled by a surge of joy I ran along the tide-ribbon, leaping over sticks and dead gulls and other jetsam. Sometimes a foolish premonition came to me, in these runs, that I must not stop before coming to Black Rock nearly a mile away, lest bad luck come upon me, and the tetralogy never be finished. For that was my inner fear; to die before I had written my book.

At the time of neap tides an area of dry sand was left, for days, at the top of the beach, where seaweed was scorched black and brittle among the corks and empty crabshells; and here the records of my visits accumulated in footmarks. These loose, hot sands purred musically under my dry naked heels. Sometimes I seemed to hear singing voices above the shimmer of the noon sun: I would pause and listen, doubting that they came from my own ears, after the underwater swimming: the singing voices rose and fell, seeming of some crystal invisibility between the earth and the sky. Always they rose and fell, and were of that remote skyey feeling I had experienced when a small child, a feeling of clearness beyond my body; but such feeling is indescribable.

One day I walked along the edge of the sea, holding my shoes in my hand, towards distant houses which lay at the far end of the bay, above the sands three miles away in the light of the immense day. I had never been there, wishing to avoid all houses; but now on impulse I thought I would walk there.

While I walked along the shallow foam-nets of the waves, the water and sand scarcely over my toes, I imagined a maiden to be walking beside me, and completing my life wordlessly. Often I imagined that somewhere under the sky was my companion, my sun-maiden, who would share with me all the loveliness of my new world. This rare and tender being, Beauty herself, would clasp me and cherish me, and I should be as the air evermore, free of all the past, with its fears and failures and mortifying experience. Until then, the beginning of each day in my cottage, before raising myself for work and action, would be vacant because the past was still undissolved in my mind. Often the past returned, vainly, sadly, clouds dulling the sun of life; but once on the sands, I felt the freedom of the blue-stained air, I was alone, but not lonely, for in the glitter of water was the spirit that one day I would find—one day, one day, one day.

Julian had insisted, from his encyclopaedic reading, that the feeling of a lyric or minor poet was but "sublimated sex". Nature, declared Julian, was but a mirror of a man's own feelings. A natural happy man would never feel the poetic urge, because he would be living all of himself. "In the old days," he had once declared, over beer and bread-and-cheese in a pub, "a major poet, providing he had the cash, had many

wives and concubines, the natural reward of a great man, who was great by virtue of his superior power and wits. No poet," he went on, "would search for a flower or a bird when half a dozen new dancing girls were waiting for him in the harem." I had hated such talk: thinking it both true and untrue. But what Julian did not know, in spite of his feelings when he would pace the room quoting Swinburne, his hands clenched, his tears falling, his eyes steadfast and seeing nothing mortal: what Julian did not know was the falcon-flash of inspiration, an emotional flash of the inner mind in which one saw, without seeing, all life and its ultimate, or primal, harmony. The mind's falcon-flash was real to me. My writing consequent upon it was automatic. I dared not premeditate; my writing would, after such a moment, write itself; and it would never need revision. When the feeling came to me, the nape of my neck would shiver, and the skin become hard, as though cold. I knew the feeling was not to be explained, or analysed; I perceived its origins instantly in the works of poets like Blake, Shelley, Thompson, Heine, Delius, Wagner, and Jefferies—poets which Julian did not really care for. I realised very soon that he who was visited by this feeling would always be lonely: as the inspired poets of olden time were lonely, singing not from their pain, but from the inner flash that struck deeper than pain: the pain was half-way between the Spirit of life and what was called normal life; when the feeling was gone, it left an emptiness in which doubt lay heavy; it was then that one longed intensely, not for a woman, but for Love.

I was twenty-four, but I knew already that my strength was in trusting to the feeling I had felt when a very small child, myself so clear and of the farawayness of voices.

Once in a rare moment when we had seemed near together, I had tried to explain this to Julian, hesitatingly, dreading mention of what should not even be meditated; and promptly Julian had said it was a well-known symptom of mental disease, described by many writers, including Dostoievsky. That struck terror into me; and for days afterwards life had not seemed worth living.

It seemed to me that afternoon, as I walked along the tideline, that the problem of peace and happiness was simple. A child should be allowed to grow itself naturally. The parents' influence should be indirect; the child should learn by the great

instinct of imitation, not by the human vice of compulsion. Everywhere in the world was compulsion, instead of inspired discipline; so everywhere in the world was lack of harmony. There could be no harmony, or attempt to create it widely, until the internecine financial system was made the servant, and not allowed to remain the master, of human destiny. Julian, and Porky—and yes, myself—were in various ways trying to writhe out of the coils of childhood's upbringing. If I could reveal the past of one human being truly, clearly objectively, then the causes of personal unrest, which were the causes of strife in the world between individuals, masses, nations, would be made plain for the first time in human history. A novel of pure cause and effect was needed in the world.

I stopped, and sat down: I was thinking too much: on the sands, I had told myself, I must think nothing. For I knew by experience that it was not good to allow such cogitations to prey upon the mind, the conscious mind: true thought arose only when I wrote, effortlessly. I must let the sun absorb me; otherwise the spirit of the sun, served by the sense of sight, from which my writing was unconsciously distilled, would not flow into and renew me.

Thoughtlessly I walked on. Hundreds of gulls standing on a wet area of sand before me watched my approach, waiting to run into the breeze from the sea, lift their wings, and launch themselves into flight. I tried to compel them to lose fear of myself by projecting into the multiple images of the flock the thought that they would receive no hurt from me; shutting my eyes and willing the force of my being into the birds. When I opened my eyes again the last of the gulls were drawing up their webbed feet in flight. That was false prayer; the Spirit must be allowed to come into one from the sky. Demands, willings, supplications, tip-toe conciliations, cadgings, humble beggary on knecs, were manifestations and proof only of mental fear.

Enough, more than enough, of such thought! I lay naked in the dry sands under the sliding hillocks ragged with marram grass, and closed my eyes, breathing deeply to release myself into the sunshine. Soon I was away from myself, poised selflessly in the murmur of waves, in the viewless whirl of blue-white atoms which was summer daylight, the maker of all life in the world.

Human voices made me sit up. Cursing, I pulled on my

trousers, thrust my arms into my shrunken nineteen-fourteen cricketing shirt, while peering through my eye-lashes to shut off the glare arising from the sand. A woman and a girl were approaching. Grabbing shoes, tunic, and stick, I scrambled up a sandy spillway to the edge of the marram grasses above. The soles of my feet were burned by the hot sand. Above was a golfing green, and turf yellow with flowers of bird's-foot trefoil. Tucking shirt into trousers, I walked on towards the houses.

Several people were on the shore, sitting by the rocks, reading and idling. I examined one face after another, swiftly, without turning my face obviously towards them. I felt suddenly lonely. The tide was far down the sands, but on the turn. I amused myself by walking on the rocks, testing my balance, until the last rock was reached, against which incoming waves were breaking and leaping. There I would sit, clad only in trousers, for as long as I could, with the hot reflection of the declining sun giving a double heat-glitter on my face, arms, and chest. I sat on a cushion of tunic and shirt, for the rock was shale, serrated. It was a queer and not unpleasant feeling to be slowly swamped and submerged. The water was warm from the sands. Julian and I had bathed only once together, soon after our arrival in March, when we had run into the sea, plunging in, and running out again, laughing and waving our arms to the scythe-like sweep of a north-east wind. As a boy the sea chilled me quickly, because I was so thin; at sixteen I had weighed only seven stone, much to my shame. Now my body was hardened, my skin pickled by the daily bathes.

Soon I should have to dive in and wade or swim to the shore, for I stayed there only by clinging with shoe-edges and fingers to the rock. "Hi!" cried a voice. When I turned I saw the woman with the girl whom I had passed some time before, now standing at the edge of the sea. Her hand was raised to shield her eyes from the sun.

For fun I swam underwater while my breath lasted, and then walked out past her as though they were not there, yet having seen that the woman was pretty, with blue eyes, and fair hair cut short, the ends upcurling slightly like feathers about her neck. Knowing they were watching me in silence, I took off my wet khaki tunic, wrung it out, knelt down to thump out the creases, afterwards standing up to fold it precisely and hang it,

with an exaggerated gesture, as of a super-tailor, over my left arm. I had left my undersized shirt on the rock; it was by now washed away. To complete the incident for my audience, whom I had hitherto ignored, I walked towards them, pausing to say seriously, "Madam! You have saved my life! Henceforward it is yours." And with a low bow, I turned and set off with rapid strides towards the distant end of the bay.

Two afternoons later I returned, this time along a sheep-path in the heather down the sands, seeing in the distance people scattered beside the rocks. This high way was wild with brambles, brake fern, and rabbits, which had so tunnelled into the dry stone wall by the path that in places it had fallen. I saw an adder, white and blue-black wickedness, coiled on a hot slab of rock.

A dozen charabancs were drawn up on the road above the sands. Never had I seen so many together at once; silently I cursed them. By the dark clothes and quiet happy faces of the people standing with a vacant contented aimlessness near the rocks, I guessed it was a Chapel outing from one of the towns. The people seemed not to know what to do with themselves.

I had not come for any particular purpose; but when I saw the fair-haired woman sitting on a deck chair by the rocks with the girl, a basket of cakes and cups and a thermos flask open beside them, I found I was waving my hand at the same moment as she waved her hand.

"Hullo," she said, with a smile. "I've been quite worried about you. Do you know you have created quite a mystery here? Come and have some tea."

Soon we were talking and laughing. She had thought me an escaped patient from some military hospital, suffering from shell-shock. The girl beside her looked at me with a very straight glance. She was quick and slender, with a mass of hair the colour of ripe barley, almost white, which contrasted with eyes of an almost indigo blue. She talked like a grown person, yet simply and naturally. I found she was interested in the flight of birds, and I spoke about the owls in my cottage. There were four young ones in the nest now, and all night the old birds were bringing mice and young rats to them, I told her; adding how I loved to hear them overhead, while she sat and looked at me with a curious stillness, as though she did not need to breathe.

The next day I went there again, this time by road on the Norton. The damaged mudguard was still ripped and unpainted. It was strange and pleasant to bestride it once more, especially as I was going to have tea with my new friends.

They were sitting before the same grey rock. I bathed with the girl, who during tea called me by my initials, which I had traced with my finger beside my tea-cup. Her mother said, "It sounds exactly as your beard looks, H.W.—rather scratchy!" She told me that she had come from abroad only two days before "saving my life", and had selected the name of the place at random in the A.B.C. railway guide on arrival at Harwich. She was charming and gracious; but once, when I stole a glance at her while making a railway tunnel with the child, her face was abstract and sad.

I accompanied them to their hotel, and was asked up for a cigarette. A telegram lay on the table. She did not open it. It lay there while I smoked a gold-tipped *State Express*; another telegram arrived as I was about to say good-bye. She invited me to dinner, but although I was hungry and would have liked some decent food—bully beef, sardines, eggs, cheese, raw onions, with bread, butter, and marmalade was all I bothered to eat nowadays—I thanked her, pleading work, and went back to the cottage. I did no work. The next afternoon I went again, had tea on the sands, and stayed to dinner with Irene, as she asked me to call her. Several telegrams were lying open about her sitting-room; another long one arrived during the meal. I was expecting the proofs of my book, I told her, and would she like to see them? Might I bring them over sometime? She said she would adore to see them. After a talk in their sitting-room—the girl listened to every word, with complete understanding, I thought—I said good-bye, and went out into the moonlight to my Norton, which had no lamps. The sergeant of police watched the bluish flame of my exhaust as I roared up the hill at forty-five miles an hour, the spark half-retarded to make the loudest noise.

In the morning Julian appeared in my doorway. He asked what I had been doing. Apparently a mason who went to the pub every evening, and who was working in the place where I had visited, had told Julian about my visits. While I told him what a decent friend I had found, a telegram arrived for me. It

invited me to tea and dinner, and ended with the words, *do come if you can manage it please Irene*. "Read it, my boy! And she said she would like to see my proofs!"

Julian read it. "Oh well, good luck to you, Maître! I'm going to get some beer."

I went over on the Norton, this time going down the rough mountain road, a short cut. Irene was reading another cablegram. Her face was pale.

"H.W., I hate to bother you, but could you tell me if you know of any place in your village where I might find rooms immediately? Please be discreet, I'm so worried, and so sorry to trouble you. He—" indicating the cablegrams—"may appear at any moment."

Sitting on the sofa beside her, I listened to her strange and tragic story, which she told me objectively, without any apparent attempt to excite sympathy. She was Anglo-Indian; married to a Judge, older than herself, whom she loved too much; would I understand, she could never *love* anyone but him; but she had gone away because her love had hurt so much. He was very quick mentally; he found fault with her slowness. They were ill-balanced. After much unhappiness she decided to come home to England with her daughter, who needed to go to school; and in a sort of despair, being attracted by a pathetic, childlike Swede in London, who had fallen violently in love with her, she had gone off with him to Sweden, leaving Barley—the girl—with her Grannie in London. She regretted it as soon as she started, but went through with it. The Swede was difficult, very temperamental, a weak man. He drank dreadfully. He had no money, his father having kicked him out of home and a job which he had neglected in the parental match factory. He borrowed all her money. She cabled to her trustees for more, and he took that. When there was no money to pay the hotel bills she decided that, owing to his devastating irresponsibility, to remain with him would only mean deeper misery. She realised she could not help Ivan, who was an artist of sorts, because he wouldn't help himself. When she told Ivan this he ran into the bedroom from the sitting-room and banged his face against the wall, in order to hurt himself and so excite further her feelings of pity which were already exhausted. With bleeding nose and weeping eyes he implored her not to leave him. He was so

pathetic, in contrast to her husband, who was so strong and stable as felspar, that out of pity she stayed. Ivan took her ermine coat and pawned it without telling her. He took her jewellery and pawned that also. At last she left him, without luggage, which was held by the Stockholm hotel until the bill was paid. She had just enough money to reach Harwich, and travel to Devonshire.

By this time I was beginning to wonder if her story was a prelude to borrowing some money from me; but as I had not yet been repaid by Porky, my reply would be truthful, if unbelievable: I had no money. However, the story was not intended as a prelude to borrowing, and I felt myself to be mean, especially as she had been so confidential and also hospitable to a stranger. Ivan cabled daily, sometimes twice daily. Now he was declaring his imminent departure from Sweden, to come to where she was!

I was shown several of the cablegrams. It was reassuring to realise that although I had in the past felt like Ivan, I had never written letters quite so wildly as that, at least I *had* written them, but never posted them. The extravagant wording of the telegrams made me harden against the unknown, yet known, Ivan. I speculated vaguely, and with a certain pleasurable thrill, what would happen to me if Ivan were to walk into the room at that moment. He would certainly think that the child Barley, sitting, arms folded, so still and self-contained beside me, was a blind; but even if he didn't, he might certainly shoot me. Ivan the Terrible! How old Julian would enjoy the telling of such a story! And imagining Porky, Ivan, and Julian together in the pub, I could not help grinning to myself. And looking up, I saw that the girl was smiling also.

Irene smiled, and said sadly, Did I know of a quiet, secluded cottage in my village? Yes, I thought I knew the very cottage. I would dash off on my Norton and make enquiries immediately. Might I take young Barley on a cushion on the carrier? I would be very careful. Irene assured me there was no hurry; she had telegraphed because in her unhappiness she thought of me as her friend. I was so sympathetic, so understanding. She felt sure my book would be beautiful. This was flattering. I saw myself jumping between her and a bullet; and the irony of the interpretation of my act by the vulgar-minded. We had tea as

usual on the sands, while I basked in the sun in my new bathing suit and told her how Julian and I had come down to write in the cottage, and how it had not worked out like that. I told her about Porky, too, and she said that life everywhere seemed to be about the same, since the War.

The next morning I did no work. The book seemed pale and vague now. I sought the owner of the furnished cottage to let. I looked over it. A guinea and a half was the weekly rent. It was thirty yards away from my cottage, with a raised garden, four bedrooms, two living rooms, and a dim kitchen half underground. There was a rotary pump from a well under the kitchen. It seemed the very place for anyone wanting seclusion. After an attempt at lunch off bully beef, onions and stale bread, I threw the lot down for the cattle dog, now a daily visitor without fear; wheeled out the Norton, and with bathing suit tied to the handlebars, left a cloud of red dust behind me up the hill, and so through the beech clump on the hilltop and the mountain lane down to the bay.

As I hurried down the sand to our usual rock, I saw Julian sitting beside Irene. It was a shock. They were laughing. Indeed, Julian was laughing loudly. His red beard was shaved. "Sailor's" rusty push bike was thrown down near, half in a pool of seawater. The girl sat by herself, arms folded, legs crossed at the ankle, against a rock. She got up and ran towards me. Julian greeted me.

"Ha, here's the village genius! Welcome, Maître!"

"Hullo, H.W. We were just talking about you. Come and sit down," smiled Irene, spreading the rug beside her.

"Thanks, but I ought to get back. I just came over to tell you that I think I've found what you want."

"Thank you ever so much, H.W. You are such a kind person, isn't he, darling? Won't you have time to stay for tea? There's plenty for everyone."

"Thanks, but I must get back."

"But how busy you are!"

"I have to write some articles," I said lamely.

"Can't you write them here? It's very quiet in the hotel. Must you really go? Barleybright, darling, H.W. says he must go. Such a busy man suddenly, darling."

"Please don't go," said the girl by my side. Had she been

there while I had been talking to Irene? The child seemed to move unnoticeably, she was always so calm and impersonal. "Tell me about owls, H.W."

"I'm afraid I must go," I heard myself saying. Julian looked at me with amused triumph on his face. His red-brown hair was oiled and brushed back from his wide forehead. "Oh, here's the address of the owner of the cottage," I said to Irene.

"Thanks ever so much. I'll probably walk over tomorrow, and perhaps I may drop in and see your proofs? Sure you can't stay?"

A light touch on my sleeve. "Stay with me," said the girl. "Do stay, please."

"I really must go."

"Take me," said the girl. She added, "I want to see the owls."

Feeling foolish, hoping my behaviour would not be put down to jealousy, I went away soon afterwards. Was it jealousy? What was jealousy? A rebuff to my conceit: I looked upon Irene as my friend, not Julian's. Anyway, I would go back and work at the new writing table bought from the postmistress for five shillings. It was of varnished deal, and holed by death-watch beetles, but it stood firm if pushed tight against the wall and wedged up with the frying-pan under one of its foreshortened legs.

Sitting upstairs at the table, with a view through the small window of the street and the farmhouse opposite, I tried to continue my book from where the writing had been broken off during the radiant summer weather beginning nearly three weeks before. I could not write, it was so quiet in the whitewashed room, so purposeless sitting there, away from the sunlight. Continually Irene's face was in my thoughts; and a remote terror struck into me, with the thought that I might be going to fall in love with her.

As I was lying in bed between eight and nine o'clock next morning, Julian walked up the stairs into my bedroom. He told me that he had met the postman, and had brought my letters to me. There were three; one in a thin, firm, flittermouse sort of handwriting that made me open the envelope over-eagerly, ripping it nearly in half, before cutting the top of the flap meticulously with the rusty safety-pin which held a tear in my trousers. "Listen to this, Julian! It's about my essay in 'The English Review'!"

"'The Passing of the Blossom' is—if I may say so—a fresh and

living piece of writing, and the first, I hope, of very many. The only quite insignificant criticisms that occur to me—if you will forgive them—are ‘the little poet’ on p. 445. Somehow it doesn’t seem to be a compliment to the long-tailed tit; and the ‘*dear* children’ on p. 448—the word hasn’t quite body enough. The whole thing is delightful in thought and feeling; and I do hope you will let me know where more of your work appears, so that I can see it. It’s a proud godfather that writes this; and he treasures the Owl.

Yours very sincerely,

Walter de la Mare.”

“What about that, Julian?”

“Oh, quite a polite letter,” remarked Julian. “I suppose Walter de la Mare groans every day at the mass of manuscript sent to him for the self-advancement of scandent young writers, hauling themselves to the heights of egotism on his efforts. I could get a letter like that if I wanted to—only I don’t want to.”

I re-read the letter, hardly caring what Julian said. His voice interrupted.

“There’s a letter from Father, old boy. I suppose you would have no objection to handing over the doings to me? Or do you still wish to control the Privy Purse?”

“I do not,” I replied, tearing open the letter, and reading it swiftly. “Your father leaves the disposal of the allowance to my discretion—so here you are. Two pounds. And if you’re wise, you won’t get into debt.”

“I never get into debt, Maître; but Father frequently does. But seriously, I am grateful to you for all your innumerable good intentions.” He was gnawing a fingernail, while eyeing the third envelope.

“Who the hell is this from?” I tore it open. “Hullo, ‘Dear Man of the Sands——’”. I glanced at the overleaf signature. “It’s from Irene.” I read it through. She was sorry I had not stayed the day before, and hoped they would see me today, at the usual place. “You are a queer mixture, H.W., but we both like you—if you will let us.” I was pleased, and to hide my feelings, screwed it up lightly and threw it on the floor. The sun was shining brightly outside. Why was I lying in bed while chaffinches were singing in the elms, and house-martins flying up to the new nest under the thatch of the farmhouse opposite?

"Huh," said Julian, nibbling nervously. His eyebrows arched themselves. "May I see the letter, old boy?"

"Certainly."

He picked it up, smoothed it out, and read it, while I dipped my face in the basin of cold water, dried myself, and pulled on shirt and trousers.

"Will you go over, do you think?" he asked casually. His voice became satirical. "'Dear Man of the Sands'! God, you are a scream, with that beard, old man! I was much amused by your spectacular stage-suicide on the rock. Irene is an extraordinarily nice woman," he added, gravely. "Don't you think so?"

"Extraordinarily nice."

"Why do you say 'extraordinarily nice'?"

"Why do you?"

Julian was wearing his brown suit and brown shoes. His hair was oiled and plastered back. "Well, Maître, I won't disturb the flow of genius. How is the book going? Nice and yellow?"

"Life is greater than literature."

"Yes: but only very very occasionally. This may be one of the occasions, however. Well, au revoir, old boy. I'll leave you to it."

On the motorcycle I went into the town, to visit a dentist. Between 1914 and 1919 my teeth had been entirely neglected, and probably needed attention now. My boyish terror of having teeth pulled out still remained. Several fillings were necessary, and an appointment made. Passing a barber's shop afterwards by chance, I hesitated. Faces always jerked towards my face. It was hateful to be stared at. But my lovely beard, which I never tired of stroking! It had almost a personality of its own, most friendly to me. It was something keeping me apart from the civilisation I had rejected. It held the sun in its soft brown hairs. The gold hairs, bleached by the sun, were always pleasing, studied in a glass. To my alarm I found myself walking into the barber's shop. Was I going to betray my own beard?

"Hair cut, sir?"

"Shave," I replied, wondering why the words of betrayal had been said. My beard, my nice beard, was going to be cut off! Like a coward, I did nothing to save it. It came off more easily than had been supposed, and left me staring at the displeasing

pallor of a weak-looking face. Yes, a hair cut please. Yes, the hair was thick, and stiff with salt, but no shampoo, thanks.

"A little brilliantine on the hair, sir?"

"Good God, no!"

"Very good, sir," said the barber, obviously not approving the particular emphasis; so I spoke about Charlie Chaplin.

"No, I don't like Charlie Chaplin. I don't hold with anything vulgar—clean fun is what I like."

"Clean fun and clean shaves your motto?"

He was pleased by the feeble witticism; nevertheless, it was good to be in the air again; his breath was decidedly nidorous.

House-martins and swallows were flying up and down the High Street. It was a grand old town, I decided.

After lunch—bread and cheese and a small tankard of stout in an oak-beamed tavern—I leapt on the Norton, meaning to go to see Irene; but instead of going the usual way I followed the Combe road and turned off over a railway bridge, thus entering a shady lane at the bottom of a wooded valley. Here were derelict iron mines, a ruinous cottage, with a forge, washing troughs, and other buildings. Tunnels led darkly into the hillside. It was a place of magpies, vipers, and solitude. How far away seemed that May month before the War, when first I had discovered it! Seven years ago—nearly a third of a lifetime. Thinking of the sun of that ancient time, something in me seemed to drag; my heart, or stomach nerves, ached; my eyes brimmed with tears. This was not crying; I had not cried since the time of being frozen in No Man's Land in December, 1914. No one else appeared to have these feelings for the past, although Delius the composer must know the haunting of what to myself I called ancient sunlight. Even Julian now was almost of the past—our walks in the early spring were gone forever.

From one gallery to another I wandered, seeing the luminous moss shining in the darkness of the hillside borings, the castings of owls, and exploring slowly and fearfully the heavy cold gloom which the striking of matches only thickened. There was a sparrowhawk's nest in a larch tree. Water ran in a deep course cut below the rusty trolley line, harts'-tongue ferns grew there, doves cooed, buzzards soared over the great pines of the wood. Far up in the blue a falcon wheeled, and as I watched it slanted down steeply at something in the valley half a mile away, falling

two thousand feet in a few seconds. It was beautiful there: it was peaceful: it was forsaken by man.

12

Open windows and Mrs. "Revvy" Carter working cheerfully with scrubbing brush and pail, blankets and sheets airing on the garden line, told me that the cottage had been taken by Irene. In a hired car Julian and Irene had come for an inspection of the cottage the afternoon before, while I had been down by the iron mines. Returning from my bathe at six o'clock, I saw that they had arrived. The girl waved to me from the balcony in what I sensed was a subdued way. My pulse beat faster with nervousness. From my window I observed Julian walking past with an unaccustomed briskness. He wore new white flannel trousers and a white shirt with roll collar open at the neck, in Byronic style. A lilac sash or scarf was round his waist: this I recognised as having been loosely knotted around Irene's shoulders when she had cried "Hi!" to me on the rock.

About half-past eight o'clock, when it seemed that the evening meal might be over, I determined to go and see Irene. Why was I so nervous, I asked myself. Had I been rude? Spica's mother had told me, on that dreadful night of farewell, that I was the rudest man she had ever known. I had always opened doors for her, jumped up when she came into the room, brought her flowers or chocolates once or twice; and when ragging Spica's elder sister, Kay, I had only meant my words in the spirit of banter. My rudeness must be on my blind spot. How awful! Had I taken her hospitality for granted, as she had declared? Oh, dreadful thought, I had never written a bread-and-butter letter after my visits. The real trouble must have been because they thought I was still seeing the notorious cousin. I was; but only in friendship. That had burned itself out before I had met them. I didn't want to think of it: except as a basis for the third volume of the tetralogy.

Yet had it been only that? Spica's mother was really a very nice woman. I suppose I had got on her nerves. And sometimes I had sworn; yet so had the sister, quite fluently, in the free-for-

all post-war fashion among young ladies. The Night of Dreadful Finality had begun when Kay had tossed me a packet of cigarettes I had asked her to buy when she was going into the town. *Thanks, here's a shilling, Kay. I don't want your blasted shilling—can't you accept a present? Well, I asked you to buy them for me. Oh, God, you get on my nerves, I'm bloody well fed-up with the lot of you.* Surprisingly Kay had burst into tears, and run up into her bedroom, and the next moment from her window arrived a black cat, legs and claws and tail spread, falling on the lawn with a howl. I heard Spica's mother's voice again: *You must have been rude to my daughter Kay, you are the rudest man I have ever known, treating us with the familiarity of old friends.* (Well, hadn't she treated me with the familiarity of a young friend, calling me Billy almost as soon as we had met?) Spica had looked piteously at me, her big brown eyes brimming with tears. *Mother, Billy wasn't rude, really.* But Spica's mother had been determined to get rid of me. *If you dislike my elder daughter Kay so, why do you stay where she is? You have an obvious remedy.* I couldn't remain after that. As I finally left, Kay came and kissed me. *Don't worry about what Mother says—she's dreadfully worried about money, and other things, and doesn't understand you. Sorry to have caused such a boring row. Only Spica's young: give her time. Try and be happy, old dear.* Kay kissed me again; and was gone. All the night I wandered about the tennis lawns behind the garden, watching the moon's swans riding in the old glass panes of Spica's bedroom window. At dawn I was away on the seventy-two mile journey to London; back to hateful Fleet Street; and so it was finished.

Hoping that my heart and breathing would be normal, I opened Irenc's new garden gate and walked up the short cobbled path. The door was open. The door knocker was stiff with rust, and my effort was not sufficient to make any sound; I knocked again and to my alarm a loud and familiar-old-friend *Bang!* resounded in the empty room. I heard the sound of frying in the kitchen, and whispering. Irene came to the door, tall and slender and cool, and I realised my intuitive misgivings had been right. With a blank face she said, "Apparently one is not to have the peace and seclusion here that one hoped for."

I could not speak.

"I am sorry to have to say it, but I see no further reason for our being acquainted."

Muttering that I was so sorry to have bothered her, I went away. I hardly knew what to do to 'break the black despair fallen on me, and after pacing the floor for an hour or so, I went upstairs, with the fixed thought of writing until I was dead. Forty-eight hours later I had written twenty thousand words of my book. I had eaten nothing and drunk only water during that time. On the third day, a Sunday, Revvy's wife knocked hesitantly on my door, and when I went down there she stood with a plateful of roast beef, greens, and potatoes. "Excuse of me, but Revvy thought you might like vor eat this."

"Thank you very much, but I'm not hungry."

"Oh, Mr. Williamson, how can 'ee deny your stummick further?" Not wishing to appear to rebuff her kindness, I accepted the plateful, and went inside again. The smell made me ravenous. I wolfed it, and feeling suddenly cheerful again, went into the kitchen next door to talk with them. There I ate some prunes and custard; and learned that Julian was still lodging with "Sailor", but having his meals with Irene.

"A proper lady, very kind, and with a *bootiful* li'l maid," said Revvy. Tomorrow, Monday, a companion, or lady-help, was expected from London. But, said Mrs. Revvy, happily, she was promised the work of cleaning in the morning and washing-up. Wasn't it lovely? Revvy was out-of-work at this time, and the thought of the extra few shillings made husband and wife happy.

From my window the next afternoon I watched Julian, Irene, and the new lady-help getting out of the 1911 Argyll. Julian energetically helped the driver to carry in the luggage. And the next morning at 7.30 a.m. as I was cautiously stropping my new razor, I saw Julian banging mats against the wall of the raised garden. He came to see me, smiling.

"How goes the masterpiece, old boy? Yellower and yellower? We heard of the starving genius stunt with much amusement. Seriously, old boy, you look rather tired."

"I'm all right." There was a pause. "I simply don't understand what's happened."

"Inside your head, or outside your head, do you mean? How should I know? Harry, old boy, the best man wins!" said Julian, rubbing his hands together. "God, she's got a marvellous figure—you weren't on the sands yesterday, were you? She's a poor dear, and I—well—I like her."

Julian looked at me humorously; then he glanced round, half furtively, as though anxious lest anyone be listening. He inhaled from his gold-tipped State Express cigarette with satisfaction, and released smoke through wide nostrils. "She says she loves me," he said, with satisfaction. He added, reflectively, "And I'm fond of her, yes, I think I can say that without hyperbole, Maître."

"Does she really love you?"

"Well," said Julian, rubbing his hands together, "if she doesn't now, she might very soon. You don't know how to treat a girl, Maître. You're not an adult yet."

"Is one an adult only when one has committed adultery?"

Julian laughed. "You are an amusing chap sometimes, Harry. You are still adolescent, of course. I must go now—I'm supposed to be helping cook the breakfast. It's a damned good life, Maître, if you don't weaken! So long, old boy."

After my breakfast of cheese and marmalade there was a tap on my open door, and Barley was by my side.

"Please, H.W., Mummie said I could come and see you if I wanted to."

"Does your mother always let you do what you want to do?"

"Yes, H.W."

"What a nice mother you have."

She nodded. "I'll wash up for you."

"No thanks, let's leave it. Come for a walk."

"No, I'll wash up. May I put on your kettle?"

After the water was hot, and we had washed up we walked up the hill to Windwhistle Cross, the beech plantation which was a favourite place. We climbed trees and planned to build a hut one day in the tallest beech, where a magpie now had a nest. The sky was shining blue above the spaces in the green leaves. We went into a small field just below the spinney which many times I had wished were mine. It had been offered to me for £200 two years previously; but alas, I had not had the money. Two partridges flew up before us. A south wind shook the grasses in the hedge. We saw a linnet shivering and twittering on a blackthorn twig, while an adder rose slowly, open-mouthed, to take it. Before I could act the girl was beside the thorn, and the linnet flying away, free again.

"The snake might have struck at you."

"Oh no, for I was not afraid."

Dartmoor tors were dark blue and high in the sky, far away. I lay on the grass to feel the sun on my face, arms under my head. The girl lay beside me, in the same attitude. I raised myself on an elbow to look at her. Her hair, cut short of her shoulders, was coarse, thick, ripply, and brighter than barley in August. She was slender yet strong, her legs thin, her feet and hands small. She rose on an elbow to look at me, as I was looking at her. I was stirred by her strangeness, for her eyes were not those of an ordinary child, but of a seer. They were wide-spaced, of a dark blue gem-hardness. She had a wide forehead, and the hair grew from it beautifully. She would be a charmer, later on, I could see that. Her dark blue eyes were her most pronounced feature. Her way of talking, too, was that of a naturally poised mind or personality. She was ageless, and yet also a child. Irene had told me she had sat up at three months old. She had never cried after learning to talk. The falling masses of bright hair, the strange direct look, the effortless movement, the calm firmness of purpose, her playfulness and unusual strength, had begotten her in India the nickname of The Puma Cub.

"How old are you, H.W.?"

"Twenty-four."

"Ten years older than I. But age doesn't matter. Please always be my friend."

"Of course, Barley."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"I'm not too young for you really. Only I can't talk like you do. But I know what you think, because I think the same. I don't want to go to school."

"We are the same age, Barley."

We lay and watched the swifts and swallows wheeling in the sky, pretending that the circles of our hands to our eyes were binoculars.

"I would like to be a bird," she said.

"I wish I were a bird too."

"You are a bird, H.W. Mummie says you're an owl. But I think you're really a falcon. You will come and see her, won't you?"

"Your mother doesn't want to see me, perhaps."

"Yes, she does, H.W. So don't worry any more. Do swifts beat first one wing, then another?"

The birds were whistling with faint shrillness a thousand feet in the air, just visible.

"Now I come to think of it, of course they do! What good eyes you must have."

"I watched them flying round the church tower last night."

We went back over the fields. The child took me to her cottage. Irene smiled sweetly, and invited me for lunch, leading me in by the least touch of her fingers on my hand. I was introduced to the new companion, who was Irish. She was called B. Her name was Bridget, which apparently she disliked.

During the meal, a merry one, the question of schooling arose. "We shall have to find you a governess, Barley darling," said Irene.

"Oh, Mummie!" said the child, wrinkling her forehead.

"Isn't she just like a puma cub, H.W.? But I prefer Barley—that lovely rich mass of hair, isn't it lovely?"

"I'll tutor her!" I felt immediate apprehension for my boldness. "My fees are a penny a month," I added.

"You'd be a very good tutor," said Irene, calmly regarding me. "But your work——"

"The idea of old Harry as m'tutor is most amusing," said Julian. "The Barleybright will learn a great deal from old Harry." He added, with a chuckle, "But only about old Harry."

"Mummy, may I really be taught by H.W.?"

It was arranged that she should come to me for an hour every morning, from noon until one o'clock, and that in return I should have lunch or any other meals I cared to have with them.

13

Julian was a different man. His fingernails, when I saw them one morning in June, were actually grown enough to be trimmed by nail-scissors. By some mysterious means the bill at the higher of the two inns—where he had made a reputation for talk, and also for capacity to absorb ale, that was to

last for two decades—had been settled. Tailors in two towns had made Julian new suits. He avoided both pubs; the puffy look left his face; the redness on brow and cheek was replaced by sun-burn. He walked more, he bathed occasionally, he wrote with less irregularity, the pain behind his eyes cleared, he was less ironic, he was at times almost peaceful. Sometimes he came to show me what he had done, usually in sonnet form. Some of the lines were startling and clear. Most of it was love poetry; but some were about the War, wherein he identified himself with the men he had killed in air-battle. These were, I thought, derived from the poems of Wilfred Owen; but they were impressive. The love poems were not clear; there was strain in them, and remembering the translations he had lent me (he had some beautiful books), I said, "Sappho." "In a way, yes, I suppose you're right, old boy," he said, with a return of the old arrogance. "But it's good poetry—I *know* it is. You with your subjective egotism judge by your own subjective feelings: but there is a classical tradition, you know!" I felt that it was good poetry when he told me it was; but afterwards it seemed somehow to be doubtful.

Rows of new books stood on the shelves of Irene's cottage. The Irish companion-help did not like Julian. One of the books, *A Shropshire Lad*, bore the inscription, *To Bee, from Julian, because her cooking is so good*. The companion-help thought that patronising, and said so. Julian's entire imaginative life appeared to be devoted to Irene. "He writes upstairs in the little dark room, and rushes down to read what he has written to Irene. How she has the patience to listen to him, I can't imagine," remarked Bee. I did not try to explain, though I felt like defending Julian. I was relieved and glad that he was working. Bee and I sometimes walked to the stile, along the right-of-way through the wheat, in order to see the Atlantic after-sunset. We used to sit on the wall of the long drive to the manor house, and stare at the vastness of fading light in sea and sky, so silent, so sad, so empty. Bee said she liked my country essays. "You're a Celt, like me."

"My grandfather was Irish," I told her.

"Ah, that's where your feeling comes from."

It was timeless summer: white owls quartered the wheat now in flag: the hues of sunset were steely in the west long

after midnight: the lime-washed cottages below in the village glimmered palely in the mystic summer night. Often I returned to sleep alone on the haystack, with a spaniel puppy I had bought from the blacksmith. The pale stars and the moon of midsummer, the light over the ocean, the calmness of the night gave an unearthly feeling of tranquillity and peace. Yet it was as though a stranger within me often sighed, longing for the companion whose presence would bring the beauty of the earth to my intimate, personal self. From the vain contemplation of a sun-maiden my mind would transform the inner self into a star-wanderer of the centuries of light, to the ultimate radiance of eternity. So sleep fell, with awakening to the thought that Farmer Furze's labourer must not see me before my spaniel puppy and I got back to the cottage with our brown army blanket.

Julian's mat-beating in the early morning had ceased. So had the conventional tutoring of my pupil. Barley could already read and write and do simple arithmetical calculations. History, I said, was no good; it had all to be rewritten, from the viewpoint that in wars and strife, many conflicting national ideas could be right at the same time. The common denominator of history was the economic basis. Food in olden times; money in modern times. It seemed better to distemper walls and carve model boats rather than read Meiklejohn's dreary dates. Irene had given me a free hand, so we spent most of our instruction out of doors, observing the natural world. We read some of Conrad together, and Jefferies' *Bevis*. I told her about Francis Thompson.

"This is where Francis Thompson recalls his days and nights of dereliction on the Embankment. He was turned out by his father, for failing to pass his medical exams. Francis was dreamy, aloof, a misfit. He wrote some of his beautiful verse while in rags on the Embankment. A girl used to give him food at night; she was a prostitute. You know what that is?"

She nodded.

"Afterwards, when Francis was taken in by the Meynells, he wrote some of his poems to the Meynell children. One of the little girls once kissed him; and he wrote a poem from that emotion, recalling his past on the Embankment, and by Covent Garden market. The hands of the clock there moved at times

with dreadful slowness; he was probably cold, and deep in physical misery—he suffered from neuralgia—and you will see a reference to the ‘barbed minutes’ of the clock in his poem. Now I’ll read a bit of it.”

I read from Volume I of the Collected Works, which I had bought with my first earnings in Fleet Street about a year previously.

*“Once, bright Sylviola, in days not far,
Once, in that nightmare-time which still doth haunt
My dreams, a grim, unbidden visitant—
Forlorn, and faint, and stark,
I had endured through watches of the dark
The abashless inquisition of each star,
Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all those heavenly passers’ scrutiny;
Stood bound and helplessly
For Time to shoot his barbed minutes at me;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night’s slow-wheelèd car;
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last.
Then there came past
A child; like thee, a spring-flower: but a flower
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,
And through the city-streets blown withering.
She passed,—O brave, sad, loveliest, tender thing!
And of her own scant pittance did she give,
That I might eat and live:
Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.*

“That was the street-walking girl, Barley.”
“I know.”

*“Therefore I kissed in thee
The heart of Childhood, so divine for me;
And her, through what sore ways,
And what unchildish days,
Borne from me now, as then, a trackless fugitive.
Therefore I kissed in thee*

*Her, child! and innocence,
 And spring, and all things that have gone from me,
 And that shall never be;
 All vanished hopes, and all most hopeless bliss,
 Came with thee to my kiss.
 And ah! so long myself had strayed afar
 From child, and woman, and the boon earth's green,
 And all wherewith life's face is fair beseen;
 Journeying its journey bare
 Five suns, except of the all-kissing sun
 Unkissed of one;
 Almost I had forgot
 The healing harms,
 And whitest witchery, a-lurk in that
 Authentic cestus of two girdling arms. . .*

"He never found that girl, though he searched for her, after he was famous. He thought she knew of his fame, and kept away deliberately. She told him, in those days, that one day his genius would be recognised. But look, the sun is shining, and you are too young to learn of such things which lie for the sensitive beyond childhood. How many millions of young men, in the War, knew that midnight desolation, under the lost horizon of their enslaved and broken lives? I expect you think me silly," I muttered.

She was attentive, understanding, composed, unemotional.

"You're too young to understand," I said, ruffling her hair.

"I'm not too young." The blue eyes searched me through; I had to evade their directness.

"Do you like the poetry, Barleybright?"

"Yes, H.W., I love the words."

"But the meaning?" I persisted.

"I know what they truly mean, behind the words."

"Come, my Barleyhair, I shouldn't be reading sad poetry to you. You belong to a new world—I'm part of the old-world, sad, frustrated world. I'm rubbish."

"You're not rubbish."

"You're a funny child. How much do you know, I wonder. The sun is shining—if you know that, you've got all the wisdom of the ages in your mind. Let's come for a walk."

"Yes, I am the sun shining. You think me young, don't you? So you don't believe me." She was by my side, waiting.

"Now, I think, a lesson in natural history. Let's climb up to the owls, and explore!"

"Yes!"

"We'll take Thunderbolt's ladder! He's asleep, or nearly asleep, against the wall of that barn over there. We'll put it back, and he will never know."

The owls entered the cottage loft by a dark triangular opening under the thatch of the end wall. Part of a tree branch, green with age and tunnelled by beetles, supported the ridge, embedded in the cob which formed the base of the triangle.

We tiptoed round by the well, and took the ladder. I placed it against the wall. She asked if she might climb first. I held the ladder. The rungs were loose, some worn thin. The top was two feet short of the opening. She mounted the top rung, holding to the roughness of the wall. "Be careful, Barley!" I cried. She laughed. "Aren't you afraid?" The masses of hair shook above her grin. She crawled through the gap, legs waving. "Be careful not to step on the lath-and-plaster! Step only on the joists or the beams."

"I will, H.W."

When I had wriggled and shoved myself through the gap, letting myself down to the reverse of ceiling on my hands, we crept slowly over the joists into the dim loft. A spread of white arose in the dimness. The mother owl perched on a tie-beam. A chirruping came from the darkness by the eaves. The owl uttered a shriek and flew past us, we heard no sound of her wings, only the wind on our faces. A blackbird cried its shrill alarm in the churchyard. We were crouching on a rough loose litter of small dry bones, fur, and the blue armour of beetle-wings. Soon our eyes became as owl-eyes, and we saw the nest. Three young birds were almost grown, standing there in new gold, grey, and white. Their baby-fluff moved in the least movement of air. As we crawled nearer these three owlets ran away.

Two more, about a fortnight younger, squatted still. Their bodies were dough-like, covered with white fluffy down. We noticed the shape of head and beak like a vulture's. The roundness of the face and head of the adult bird was due to thick feathering. She picked them up and sat them on her lap, then we saw a still smaller pair, and when these were added to her

lap, there remained yet another pair, new-hatched and blind, so small that I could put both in the palm of one hand. We counted about fifty mice and voles and young rats lying around the nest. There must have been several sackfuls of bones and fur lying about; yet the owls smelt fresh. There was no waste here, as around a hawk's nest or eyrie: the owls swallowed their prey whole, and the castings or pellets of indigestible stuff thrown up from their crops were clean feather, bone, and fur.

I went down for a basket, and climbed up again. Neighbours came out to see what the girl carried, shielded from the glare of the sun. "My!" remarked Mrs. Revvy, "You oughtn't to let the young leddy do such things, Mr. Williamson! Fancy climbing up to see they dirty old birds. Our place be vull of vleas, from they owls."

"There are no fleas in my place," I said. "Although sometimes I hear mice moving in your coal-cellar," I added.

Mrs. "Thunderbolt" Carter, her neighbour and cousin by marriage, also remarked that it was not quite healthy to allow a young girl to go crawling about in such a place. "I can't sleep because of the bumping noises made by the birds. I must say, Mr. Williamson, I don't think the owls ought to be allowed to remain up there. It can't be healthy, what do you think? You like them, so does Revvy he says, well, there's no accounting for some people's tastes. Still writing? You're always writing, aren't you, so they tell me, I don't know, it's none of my business. I suppose you're still hoping for fame, and there's no harm in trying, is there?" She laughed mirthlessly.

Usually I felt myself disintegrating when talking to her, then I became rude to this big-faced stupid woman, who had married the club-foot cripple to get a home for herself—to the distress of poor Bessie, her sister-in-law who had always looked after her brother until he married; I simply couldn't help being rude. But now with Barley I was unaffected.

"What are you going to do with those creatures, my! aren't they ugly. Ugh! I can't imagine how you can have them near you without shuddering."

She spoke always rapidly, seldom looking me in the eyes. She came from a class superior to the ordinary village people, and was a little deaf. Her husband was even more deaf—or pretended to be. His sister Bessie and his wife, all three living in

their clean neat cottage with its protecting wall, often were in dissent. Bessie kept the dairy; her butter was the best in the village, cool, firm, and deliciously salted.

Pale-faced Bessie came out of her dark house to see the owls. She was thin, with woeful eyes, and walked stiffly, perhaps with rheumatism. With Bessie, I always felt safe. "There now! How you do love they oyls!" she remarked, in her craking voice. "Pretty birds I reckon, and do a lot of good catching mice, they say. 'T'es wonderful what a lot of different things there be in the world, ban't it, midear?" leaning down and smiling her sweet, crooked smile at the girl.

"Owls are beautiful things," said Barley.

"There now, vancy that!" exclaimed Bessie, with a smile.

Having shown the young owlets around—"What a chap you are, Harry!"—we climbed up and put them back. Coming down again, there stood Thunderbolt on his club feet and stick. He was staring at his ladder. Into his deaf and hairy ear I shouted, "I am a cad, I have bad manners, I stole your ladder, it was wrong of me, I should have asked permission, I'm sorry, I apologise. I saw your cows eating my currant bushes over my garden wall yesterday morning at seven o'clock, when you thought I was asleep, while for seven minutes you leaned against the other wall and complacently watched them, you're sorry and you apologise, too, don't you, now you're found out, Thunderbolt Willy?"

"Thunderbolt" was a corruption of Vanderbilt, because he was supposed to be rich: this seven-acre dairy farmer.

His mouth drew down and open, his eyes too, and he took a long suck of his old pipe, removed it, and with wide-open eyes, "Aw haw haw!" he cried solemnly, then poked me in the ribs. "Aw haw!" he guffawed. "Aiy, coo-coos do like currants, aw haw haw! You take the ladder whenever you'm a mind to, zur, I'm only too plaized vor lend'n to 'ee. 'T'es nothing to me what others speak agin 'ee, you pay your way, and I've nothin' to zay agin 'ee, midear. You take the ladder. You'm welcome!" He stumped away on his club feet. I wondered what he meant, by others speaking agin me, but in the company of Barley, it seemed not worth bothering about.

"People always talk, I learned that in India, H.W. You won't let them upset you ever, will you? Promise me?" The direct blue eyes were looking into mine.

"Not while you're with me, Barley."

"Then I'll always be with you, H.W."

Irene pleased me by saying that my lunch had been earned: her Barley had learned something about England.

Barleybright and I went to many places together, she riding on the carrier of the Norton. She had a natural sense of balance. We went to a rocky bay beyond the Morte, where at low tide we found a big conger eel in the boiler of a wrecked steamship: to another distant village, to explore the old silver mines and the strawberry gardens: we walked the headland, and climbed down North Side, and fished for dogfish off Flat Rock, throwing our lines out towards the church visible in the brown, rocky promontory across the bay: we walked over the Chains of Ex-moor, she riding on my back across water-plashes where the cotton-grass grew in the bogs. She told me of her grannie's villa in the High Pyrenees, of ski-ing in the snow by the empty huts of peasants who spent the winter in the valley villages, and how every peasant was allowed one tree a year for firing, choosing it by lot, and how all except the luckiest would bargain afterwards for a bigger tree, getting one another drunk. We walked over the sandhills by the estuary, going out all day with sandwiches and bottles of milk and lemonade carried in my pack. We watched the salmon netsmen fishing off the gravel ridge, and bathed in the pits left by the digging of gravel by the barges. The girl wore a white bathing dress which showed her shape beginning to bud. Her tumbled shining hair fell on her brown shoulders, her arms were thin and brown too, she smiled widely, she was delight itself as with a shake of her curls she poised herself before plunging into the green water, through which she seemed to slip without splash or effort. "Come in, H.W., it's lovely!" she cried, rolling over on her back. Yes, as Irene had said, she was going to be a beauty. She swam and dived with an ease beyond premeditation, and would have crossed the channel to the fishing village had I not begged her not to try against the swift currents. After disporting in the warm clear pools we picked up our things and started to walk back, in our bathing suits, over sandhills that rang in the heat. Soon we were dry, the salt white on our brown flesh, and the sands burning the soles of our feet. I felt myself to have no body, only the joy of life. The pale blue sky was pierced by larksong. We got back

late; and when the girl had been given a hot bath (Irene thought she was over-tired) and was in bed, Bee came to my cottage, with a message that Irene would like to see me alone.

"I feel most awfully mean, H.W.," began Irene, "after the way I treated you when I thought you had been unfair in talking about Julian on the sands when first we met, especially when you appeared at the same time to be talking about me to him. But tell me, H.W., has Julian any money of his own? Between ourselves, I lent him forty pounds, as he seemed in difficulties, and a nice boy. I've been rather hard up lately, paying off one thing and another, and I've asked Julian several times if he could manage to repay the loan. His replies puzzle me. He has a different excuse each day. I can't make him out. Are all writers the same, unable to discern reality from imagination?"

I told myself that this time I would be careful not to be involved again. "Well, you know, I suppose all of us tend to go along a single-track of the mind, which is a form of egotism or selfishness."

"You put it very nicely, H.W.; but the position isn't happy here. Do you think if I wrote to his father? Julian is such a contradictory mixture. Bee can't bear him in the house, and I don't want her to go. And I cannot bear the idea of a friend lying to me. There's no necessity to be untruthful. Why do men——" Appealingly she looked at me. I saw that she was tired. "Do you think I'm an awful washout, H.W.?"

"Certainly not. I think you're very decent. In fact, too decent. I understand exactly how you feel."

"I wonder. Sometimes I don't understand myself. I suppose really I am just an awful fool. Hullo, darling! I left you in bed, naughty one! Been with nice, kind H.W.? What has H.W. been telling you this time, darling? Been stealing my puma cub, has he?"

"He told me about salmon, about the War, and how a four-stroke engine works, Mummie."

Irene gave me a smile in which was a suggestion of bewilderment, pride, amazement, admiration. "The new generation, H.W. Direct, straight . . . none of the inner complications that grieve you and me—but you're a boy still, H.W., with a wonderful future——"

Perhaps it was the strong sunlight of the long day, or the

tiredness; or the unexpected sympathy, but I could not help the tears coming into my eyes, and I turned away to conceal them. I thought of Maddison, and the vain aspiration of his life, of his death in the sea: and I thought of the War, my mind willynilly carrying the weight and blasting power of the barrages and all that helped to create them. Merely an obsession? Why was life a making and a breaking of friendships, ties, affections? I was rootless, fallen in a gap wide between two worlds. When Irene went, as she had spoken of going, where would my life be then? Julian and I were already far apart.

"H.W.'s tired too, isn't he, darling? Let's give him a peg and send him home to his chaste couch with Billjohn. It's the sun: it must have been hot in the sandhills. Your hair, my baby, is very nearly bleached white, and oh, so full of sand. I must wash it tomorrow."

"Oh, Mummie, I do so hate my hair being washed. And I wasn't tired, really. You can't get tired in this sun, it isn't like India, Mummie."

"Well, run wild while you can. Now to bed, my sleepy-head. H.W., I'm going to give you a cup of malted milk to drink."

Julian came in as I was going. His fingernails were gnawn again. Bee had told me he had been very attentive to Irene, making many attempts to jump up and carry plates, fetch bread, etc. Now he was silent, his head held down at an angle, as though self-absorbed; but he glanced uneasily at me. I knew by his quick breathing how he was feeling, vainly trying to shift the weight of misery in his breast by thoughts of the dead Swinburne, of loneliness and darkness to be faced once more by poetry. He was between hope and despair: listening to and watching every word and smile and movement of Irene: and longing to escape the interior weight of feeling by imagining himself striding into darkness and death and the ultimate triumph of poetry over life. I knew how he was feeling; and yet I felt only impatience with him.

After dinner the next evening, when I had sat for a while as usual on the edge of Barley's bed—every night she insisted with a quick smile, "You'll come and say goodnight to me, H.W.?"—I walked back to my cottage and lay on the grassy slope of the garden wall, watching for the white owls flying over the tombstones and between the elms. Julian approached.

"May I speak to you in confidence, old boy?"

"Certainly."

"What's eating her, Harry?" he asked, in a low voice. "What did she say to you when you came in this evening? God, I feel pretty bad, Harry. What did she say to you?"

"Oh we talked about various things. Look! Did you see that rat in the owl's foot. Hark at the noise! It's like a lot of little engines letting off steam."

He gave a glance, and went on:

"She's pretty fed with me, isn't she, Harry?"

"Well, I expect you know yourself, Julian."

"I thought so," he muttered. To my uneasiness he began to sob. "By God I love her, Harry. I've never felt like it before, I swear it's true. I want to—you may laugh—to help her, to protect her. I—I—by God——"

When he was less unhappy, I said, "Julian! Go away, go at once, make a gesture, go away and work like hell and write and write, and knock the hell out of yourself by using your fine gifts. Why, with your knowledge, you'd be invaluable on a paper like *John o' London's Weekly*, or *The Bookman*——"

He turned and glared at me. "By God, Harry," he said, "I may be a maundering idiot, but I won't stand that sort of insolence from even you! By God, you can laugh, you long lounging insolent fool, with your unreadable prose in imitation of that unreadable cataloguer Jefferies, but by Heaven!—one day I tell you, I will write great verse that shall shake the world—oh, by God! it's intolerable." He strode off up the road. I felt weak and silly; I laughed until I fell off the wall, watched by Revvy, his wife, and his son Ernie, peering from behind their bedroom curtains.

I heard Julian returning down the street about an hour and a half later, I heard his laughter and the inarticulate noises of his companion, "Sailor", with whom he lodged. Their footfalls and noises went round the corner, and the night was to the owls again.

It was the third day of July, and half Sailor's pension was already spent in beer. His eyes at night were those of a pole-axed bullock. Enough wit remained, however, as he lurched to his feet in the Lower House, to articulate to Julian, "Gennulman or—*hic*—no gennulman—" pause of about twelve seconds, while he gathered the juices in his mouth around his tongue and squirted them accurately, at an angle of 60°, into a brass spittoon on the floor—"I'm going—*hic*—to—tell you, hey?—*hic*—that you'm, hey?—*hic*—a drunken booger! Hey?" Sailor sprawled on the form again. He staggered to his feet. "And no drunken booger won't—*hic*—hey?—won't bliddy well sleep no more—*hic*—in my bed!" His dark hair fallen over his eyes, with a sweeping gesture of dismissal, Sailor sagged and became, in the critical landlord's phrase, "dumb as a bit of meat".

"You're blotto, my poor friend," remarked Julian, scornfully, standing by the bar, holding a pint glass in his hand.

That night Julian walked into my cottage while I was in bed. He stumped upstairs, and lay down on his old bed, fully dressed, and fell asleep. In the morning he was deferential and conciliatory, but I said "No" to his pleading. He could find no one in the village to take him in—until finally he went to Irene, and she gave him a couch-bed in the little garden apple-room attached to her cottage.

The next morning the village taxicab, a brand new 1921 Ford tourer, shook as the engine idled outside her gate. Julian's boxes of books with other luggage were packed in the back. Irene, in a neat tailor-made coat and skirt of black, and wearing a small blue hat of fine straw and a single feather, got in beside the driver. Julian sat magnificently alone beside his belongings in the back seats. I shook him by the hand. "Good luck, old boy."

"Thank you, Maitre. You need it more than I do," he replied, with an air of restrained and courteous gravity.

Irene came back from the 10.40 a.m. Waterloo train, saying "Thank goodness he's gone."

Julian got out at the Town station (it was Friday, market day, and the pubs were open all day) and returned on the evening 'bus. Again he slept in the garden room, again the new Ford trembled at idling-speed of its 20-h.p. engine. This time Irene

and Bee sat in the back seats, while Julian sat beside the driver. Irene was again smartly dressed, in a navy-blue coat and skirt, and wearing a small hat completely made of feathers, dyed a lighter blue. To the same train: but this time the Ford carried the traveller to the Junction beyond the Town station. Exeter was the first stop, forty miles away. Julian got out of the train at Exeter, and returned by the evening 'bus, this time soberly, humbly, imploringly. He slept that night in my cottage, and I slept on Farmer Furze's haystack. In the morning Irene's door was shut and locked. Julian's luggage had been left at Exeter. He rode on the carrier of the Norton to Exeter. He stood by the open window, in the corridor of the London train, aloof and erect. We did not speak. The whistle blew, the green flag waved, the long train moved quietly. We shook hands. I saw tears in his eyes when I turned away to hide my own.

Part II

ANNABELLE

*'I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more.'*

—Richard Lovelace.

15

A brown army blanket covered the kitchen window. The room glowed with yellow lamp-light. Outside the winter night was wild and stormy. Puffs of smoke came from the kitchen range. Inside the oven the birds were roasting. Billjohn the spaniel lay on a sack before the fire, on his side. A small cat, called Pie because she was black and white, sat close to the spaniel, gravely staring at the glow between the worn fire-bars. Three pots simmered on the range—brussels sprouts, potatoes, and bread sauce with onion. A half-bottle of claret stood on the tarred wooden chimney piece. It was my birthday party. I was twenty-five years and nearly two hours old. The church clock had just struck one. My birthday had passed: I had been born half an hour before midnight on 1 December, 1896. And my birthday dinner, which I had started to prepare at half-past six, was still cooking.

At seven I had gone, as usual, to the Higher House, leaving the partridges in the oven with rashers of bacon pinned by matchsticks to their breasts, and a good fire to roast them. Leaving the inn at nine o'clock, I had returned to find the room full of smoke and the fire out. The south-west gale was blowing. Having re-lit the fire, I settled in my armchair—surplus Officers' Mess furniture—and continued reading *Way of Revelation*, a new and long War novel which was at the time a best-seller. It was magnificent, a real book. For two evenings I had sat before the fire, blanket over window, cat and dog on sack, living with Adrian Knoyle, Eric Sinclair, Burns, Walker, Fotheringay, Gina, and Rosemary; I had trudged the battlefields of Neuve Chapelle, Loos, Ypres, Somme, Hindenburg Line—oh, marvellously real and true, a recreation of the incredibly vanished

times and places! By the reference to Jefferies, and the description of country places, I knew exactly what the author Wilfred Ewart was like, and how lonely he must be. Should I write to him, and tell him that I knew every shade of hope and excitement which had written his book for him, and that we must be friends? I read on; I was with the battalion officers in the forest hut as the colonel gave orders for the daylight attack: I knew how they felt as they swallowed their quick drinks of whiskey, before going back to their companies and platoons: I was with them when the German machine-guns opened up from the forest of Mormal, and they fell, and a stream of chips was cut from the young oak tree just above the head of the wounded Adrian. . . . Here at last was someone whose glance was level upon the world of reality, level in a post-war world of prejudices, hates, scornings, and denials. Dare I write to Captain Ewart and send him a copy of my own book? Dare I? A book about a small boy in the country of pre-war England?

My book had been published on the 13th October. Early that day I had gone on my motorcycle to the station bookstall three miles away, and bought *The Times*, with its Literary Supplement, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Morning Post*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Daily News*, *The Daily Herald*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Sketch*; and, after hesitation, *John Bull*. Would there be a leader in *The Times*? With a feeling of the immense importance of the moment—a feeling reckoned by my quicker-beating heart and sense of apprehension—I walked with the papers to the platform seat, and began to look for my name among the news columns on the principal pages, then on lesser pages, then even among the Shipping, Stock Exchange, and Board Meeting Reports. Ah, there it was; but the Williamson of that small “stick” item was called Alf, and he was merely a bigamist. Surely the *Literary Supplement* would notice the book? It was not even in the advertisement columns.

During the weeks of November reviews came by post, exciting little packets wrapped in green paper from the Press Cutting Agency. I read them many times, until I knew them by heart. *The Manchester Guardian* said it was a beautiful love story, written with an absolute candour which was truly spontaneous, a book of such moving poetry that the reader instinctively turned back to many passages when the book was finished. *The Times Literary*

Supplement was more reserved, calling it a labour of love, a record of sights and scenes and smells which the normal small boy in the country would encounter. Mr. S. P. B. Mais in the *Express* said it was a first novel of quite unusual distinction and beauty, stamping the author as a true poet of nature. *The Pall-Mall Gazette and Globe* said the author had great understanding of children. *The Spectator* declared the book memorable; the good old *Weekly Dispatch*, from which I had been sacked, said it was real literature; and my friend (I never saw him, but felt him to be my friend) Gerald Barry in *The Saturday Review*, while objecting to a purple passage about a grandfather clock, said the writer was worth taking seriously. Miss Rose Macaulay in *The Daily News* said it contained such hideous words as *lastly* and *photo*. And Julian's friend, Harold, the young critic, after asking me to send him a copy, for review in *Red Tape*, the Civil Service magazine, concluded a wholly destructive *critique* with the words, "We cannot honestly join in the chorus of approbation." I had met Harold; he lived with his father, and was not very strong, a pale-faced young man with a wispy moustache, and a stoop. Harold had the highest thought about what Literature should be; he was an admirer of Mr. Middleton Murry, editor of *The Athenaeum*, for whom he reviewed books; and Julian often quoted derisively a phrase from one of Harold's criticisms in that weekly, on Lord de Tabley's verse, of which, had declared Harold in print:

"the poetic content is firm and satisfying".

I stuck the press clippings in a big book given me by a bookseller in the town, with black covers, in which 1920 Christmas card samples had originally been glued.

Now, on my birthday, I glanced over the criticisms, before putting the book back in its place on the shelf, and opened the oven door. Surely the partridges were cooked by now? I had shot them a week before in one of the Crowcombe farm fields, having been invited to shoot over his farm by John Brown, the owner. A pleasing left and right; and Billjohn the young spaniel had retrieved one of them, growling and wagging his curly stump as he came to my hand held down for the bird.

At half-past one in the morning the cork of the half-bottle of St. Julien was drawn, the dark red wine poured into the small

jam-jar used as a glass. The birds were tender, and I was hungry. The meal was interrupted while a note was made of what the landlord of the Lower House had said of a wandering pheasant he had shot and eaten.

"A bootiful bird, fat he was, and shining. I didden wait long 'fore I tackled 'n. I'd ate 'n all up less than a hower after shutin' of 'n! I made the booger sit up! Didden I, tho! I made the shins of 'n rattle!"

My dog sat on the right of the chair, my cat on the left. Flinging away the blunt knife, I held a partridge in my fingers, gnawing and tearing with my teeth, spitting out No. 6 shot and dropping the bones from my mouth, now on the left, now on the right of the chair. Everything was eaten by two o'clock. The chair was slewed round, facing the range now open. With feet on the warm iron I watched the teak logs burning with green and blue and red flames: salts of cuprum, bārium, and strontium which the cooling floods had washed to the sea, now arising again before my eyes in the fires of creation. By God, I said aloud to an imaginary Julian, this is the life; it's a poor heart that never rejoices. At the sound of my voice the little cat half got up, her green eyes between dreaming and alertness, while the dog thumped his tail and moved to lay his chin on my knee. The door shook to the buffets of the wind.

I was twenty-five years old, a third of my life had been lived, and what had I achieved? "What have I done?" I shouted, lighting my pipe from a glowing charcoal. For answer the cat chirruped and leapt nimbly on my left knee, while the dog arose on hind legs, like a little man with feathery trousers, and yowled. Then he climbed up, to share my lap with the cat. We sat there until the fire burned away. "Good old Pie. Nice boy, Biell. (Revvu called Billjohn *Biell*, Devon for Bill.) But you're not enough. Shall I ever meet her? She's somewhere in the world, a proud girl like Emily Brontë, her heart burning with the solitary fire of Sirius. Now Biell, you must go outside, for we're going to bed. Perhaps the postman will bring us a letter to-morrow."

The wind wrinkled the rain-plash driven in under the door. The whining dog was lifted by my foot into the night, and the door closed. He is a hero, I thought, if he can do his job in such

weather. But Billjohn was no hero. The next moment his head appeared at the round cat-hole a foot above the skirt of the door, then his two fore-legs; and like a seal he squeezed through, with a groan of relief. Pie ran to him and arched herself against him: he yawned with a yowl, showing his long tongue. I went up the staircase. The animals slept downstairs, in a special basket; they were forbidden to go upstairs. A few minutes after I had got into bed the delicate patter of the cat's feet sounded on the bare boards of the stairs, followed by the slow, as if cautious, lolloping claw-titter of Biell. Very cautiously one after the other climbed on my bed. I pretended to be asleep. Soon they were comfortably settled on my feet, while the rain from the thatch splashed heavily on the sett-stones below the open window, and my thoughts wandered back into the past.

Dandelion Days had been finished in September, after Irene, Bridget, and the young Barley had left the village. They left at short notice, because Ivan the Terrible, whose cablegrams had been succeeded by periodical showers of letters written in a large spreading hand, on deckle-edged envelopes, had cabled his imminent arrival for the rest of his life. During the hasty packing I had devised a scheme to lead him astray, should he arrive after Irene's departure. In her cottage were samples of notepaper with headings, which had been sent from Harrods' Stores. On one of these, with a Perthshire address, I wrote a letter beginning *My poor dear Child*, and then followed an invitation to Irene to go north at once, and there to meditate on the advisability of renouncing the world and her child, and taking the veil. The child had thought this most amusing, shaking her curls as she laughed. After signing myself *Hubert Crackanthorpe*, I tore the letter into six pieces and scattered them on a flower, or rather weed, bed by the cobbled path. Ivan, I guessed, was a man of either very keen or very dull sight: and if he were dull, I would pick up the pieces and give them to him. But Ivan never turned up; he had probably got into another emotional tangle by that time.

I missed Barley and Irene after they had left in September. The sands were empty, save for the great width of sea and sky. Swallows flew in clouds over the Naps, as the low cliffs were called, so excitedly, so happily, truly a band of brothers adventuring the earth. The spaniel followed faithfully my foot-

steps, or ranged ahead, always keeping me in sight; the cat awaited our return, sitting on the wall or the window sill. Day after day dog and I went down to the sands, seeing the swallows go and the last human visitor depart. I sat at high spring tide alone on the rocks in the westering sunlight, while the waves hung their golden fleeces on the rocks. At low tide I lay in the declining warmth of late September in the dry loose upper sand, empty, truthful, free. But ever the shadow of the headland was lengthening on the afternoon sands, and when the golden brow was gone behind its massive length a melancholy as dark as the headland's shadow fell upon me. It was as though I were the last human creature on an abandoned earth. Many times I searched the skyline, almost in desperation, for a figure walking there who would wave an arm and come to my side, and be with me always. The buzzards soared in the sunset; the gulls returned to their cliff ledges, flying silently in formation; the white owls fanned over the mice-runs in the stubble. Fire lit, blanket fixed, cat and dog content, voices of my neighbours raised in shout and counter-shout; the Norton standing against the wall, red summer dust thick on frame and wheels; so the days and weeks passed, from autumn into winter. Here was I, and that was all

16

Just before Christmas a friend with whom I had soldiered during the War wrote to me and said he had read my book and liked it, and it had well started a career he had foreseen in 1917. Would I care to spend Christmas with him and his family? He could give me a day or two's hunting, if I would bring my kit. He was farming a few hundred acres, and also ploughing by tractor, contract work, for other farms in the area of heavy Essex clay called The Rodings. Bring my gun, too.

I decided to go at once. Billjohn the spaniel was boarded out with the landlord of the Higher House, whom I knew to be a kind man. He asked if he might take him when he went shooting rabbits. The Norton was left in the kitchen, the petrol drained from its tank. About half a hundred logs of teak and pitch pine were stacked by the hearth. I shook and folded and piled the blankets

in correct barrack-room fashion, leaving them on the bed. The windows, with their small dingy curtains fixed by rusty nails, were left open. Outside the black new 1921 Ford waited with my luggage. I ran to Bessie Carter's window, and asked her if she would give Pie a large saucer of milk twice a day: I would pay her on my return. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. "Thunderbolt", considered me unkind to animals, because occasionally the yelps of the spaniel being lightly whacked by hand had come from my kitchen, from where the puppy lay beside a plash on the lime-ash floor. No animal, except black pig, was permitted on their premises; and a succession of these unfortunate creatures wallowed in their own dung in a totally dark outhouse by the dipping-well. "Thunderbolt" of the club feet rarely cleaned out the house; he told me once that pigs thrived if they always stood shoulder-deep in darkness and their own dung. For training my puppy to be house-clean, Mrs. "Thunderbolt" thought me to be cruel.

There was a strange feeling in being seated in the car, in leaving the village. London was at the other end of the earth. Indeed, Devon was an entire new world. What had been happening in the old world I had left so long ago? I had not read a newspaper for nearly a year, except those bought on 13th October, and those had only been scanned for my name. Occasionally one of my neighbours, "Uncle Joe", would come up to me and say, "What do you think about this yurr murder case?", or Mrs. Thunderbolt would accost me with, "Isn't it terrible the crime there is in the world today? What's it all coming to, goodness knows, but something ought to be done about it, anyhow, here we are, here today and gone tomorrow, I always say, oh, aren't you interested in murder cases, but tut, what a funny man you are, supposed to be a writer, too, well, there's the bell going, and as a baptised Christian I mustn't be late for Church, must I?"

The train running on the single-track followed the valley of the Taw for many miles, now under hillsides of spruce fir plantations, now making sudden hollow thunder on the iron bridges over the river in spate. At Exeter there was time for a glass of beer and a sandwich in the refreshment room, while constantly eyeing the clock: in my bag was the corrected typescript of my second book, which would be handed over to the authentic

Mr. J. D. Beresford at about a quarter to five on that day. The thought lay heavy on my stomach. I was going to London: I was going to London, and something surely was about to happen. London—could it be the same London, after all the things that had happened—Julian, Porky, Ivan the Terrible, and all the other things of my adventurous life? My feelings did not actually formulate themselves as above; I was disturbed by intense vague hope, dread, fear, and loneliness; I knew no other world save that of a dead boyhood and a dead war, and my own hopes and feelings of the present. The phase of self-sufficiency in the present had gone with my beard and the perpetual sunshine which had bleached the crown of my hair from brown to golden; now once again the present was nothingness, and I lived either in the past with regret, or in the future with strained hope. The present was always slightly unreal to me.

It was growing dark when the train began to pass between the dull brick cliffs and dreary roofs and chimneys which was London. A fog was appearing. I felt slightly sick, and was sweating coldly. The phase of regarding London as something that must be actively striven against and dissolved by spiritual force so that trees and fields and sweet human life might arise there again, was passed, thank God; that feeling had been made the more active or pronounced by the reading of Jefferies' *Story of my Heart*, and the miseries over Spica and my work on the Sunday newspaper; but London was still a dreadful place, although the noisy glooms of Waterloo Station no longer were of war-time's farewell, fortitude, sadness, and death. Where were the soldiers now? They were ghosts. To my slight dismay I realised that one of the ghosts of them was myself. I hurried out of the station. It was chill and foggy outside.

Mr. Beresford was waiting for me, seated by a warm coal fire. Tea for two was on a tray. After greetings, I waited for him to speak, not realising that I as guest was offering nothing for an overworked author's interest. Further, I did not realise then that he too was a writer, with hopes and dreams akin to my own: for all writers, whatever their age, are buoyed by hope and dejected in the reaction from writing.

He asked about my journey, and how I liked Devon. I nibbled a folded slice of bread and butter, and spilled tea in my saucer. Dare I tell him about Porky, who had impersonated him in

Devon? Dare I ask him how my novel had sold? As if in answer to my thought, he said:

"I'm afraid your book hasn't done very well. As I told you, I thought it wouldn't sell when I decided to recommend its publication. But it had a good press for a first novel, and you're no longer unknown."

A red-haired boy wandered into the room, was introduced as Tristram, shook hands with me, and wandered out again.

"I've brought the second book of the tetralogy."

"Ah, yes, you mentioned it in your letter. I shall look forward to reading it."

"I hope it's good," I said, producing the typescript bound in red ribbon. "Here it is."

"How long is it?"

"About a hundred thousand words."

"Oh, longer than *The Beautiful Years*?"

"Yes. Shall I read you some?"

A look of patient weariness came over Mr. J. D. Beresford's face; it passed immediately into a slight smile as he saw me glance at a great pile of typescripts on a table by the wall; there was another heap on the floor. "Of course you are keen on it, of course, quite right, old chap; but I think perhaps I'd get a better idea if I read it myself," he said in a kindly voice.

His kindness lessened the recoil of my past-self upon the unrealisable present. Quickly, nervously, I told him about Porky, and Porky's story of how he had lost J. D. Beresford's memory after a toss in the hunting field. I was nervous; I knew I could not bring Porky to life, and as he began to look abstract, as I must have looked when Julian was urging Catullus upon me, I said I must be going. He shook hands affably, and I tried to think of something to say about his work. Was he writing a new novel? I mentioned that Porky had "raved about" the Jacob Stahl trilogy, declaring it was the finest thing in modern literature. "And it hasn't sold a thousand copies," smiled Beresford, slowly. "Good-bye, old chap, keep your spirits up—you'll win through one day." Fervently I shook his hand, and went out into a fog which was now so dense that no shine of a street lamp was visible until I had nearly blundered into the cold, wet, iron post.

Over the flat and heavy ploughlands of Essex lay the white mist. The hedgerow was a ghost dimly suggested by the beam of the headlight. The sidecar swung me lightly; I could feel the gravelly road rushing by under my seat. My companion's shoulders and leather-helmet'd head towered above my right shoulder. Long since had I abandoned myself to the idea of a smash in the fog, as the sidecar was wrenched round sudden corners, as the twin-cylinder J.A.P. engine accelerated with decisive clatters of its exhaust in my ears. No longer was I sitting tense and strained, but inert, suspended. After the first greeting, which had been mutually cordial to conceal the first slight shock of our altered mutual appearances, we had become silent, although not awkward. A glass of beer in *The Thesiger Arms*, a false resuming cordiality.

"I hope Essex won't be too flat and depressing after the hills of Devon, Willie."

"I'm looking forward immensely to everything, old boy."

"There's a Hunt Ball, and a hoss of sorts for you, and I thought perhaps a weekend sailing in the Blackwater estuary—we could sleep in the club house, and catch flatfish. I hope it won't be too boring."

"I hope I shan't bore you, Pickles."

After such conversation we went outside to the motorbike and sidecar, and a journey seeming fast into the blind fog.

I had thought of Pickles for the past three years as a character in a War novel to be written sometime in the future; and I found myself several times during the next two days regretting that I had come to see him, because the new Pickles had now effaced my old friend, with whom I had once been so "thick". I was homesick for the old days; and I longed to be able to live easily, thoughtlessly, naturally, in the present. Pickles' wife was kind, quiet, and understanding. They had a small baby about which both told uninteresting things as though they were most interesting. The baby smiled at me, but that seemed only natural, because I considered that I had a superior understanding of babies. "Priscilla likes all men," said the baby's mother, and my superior understanding appeared another illusion.

I fancied myself as a horseman, since I had passed a Rough-

rider's Course in 1916, which included being watched by a group of staff-officers mounted on chargers as comfortable as armchairs and docile as cats while I, seated bareback on a harassed and hard-mouthed hack, and facing its tail with my arms crossed, was bumped and jerked by the wretched beast over a series of fences which it was entirely disinclined to jump.

"A neighbouring farmer, another poor devil trying to get a living out of blue gault clay like me, to whom I lent your book, said you could ride his nag if you liked, Willie. It shies at some things, otherwise I believe it's not a bad ride."

"This country looks heavy-going, Pickles, I suppose it's corned-up, used to hunting?"

"Actually the hoss is out to grass, I fancy, but Percy said he would give it a feed of oats if you'd like to take it out."

I saw the horse, a chestnut gelding 15.2 hands high, unclipped, unhogged, and undocked. It looked too light for going over ploughlands, although I weighed only ten stone. The chestnut had a white, backward look in its eye, and shifted on its feet when it saw me. Percy, the farmer who lived in the farmhouse with his sister, was a pleasant young man, who said, "Yes, I liked your little story. I found one mistake, however, where you describe the shepherd stripping the coat off a dead lamb and tying it on another lamb, so that the ewe would take it as her own. Actually, since all were recently born, it would only have been necessary to rub the live lamb in the dead lamb's after-birth. But, of course, I realise it was only meant to be a yarn, and I enjoyed it."

I explained that I had watched the actual scene described, when a boy: adding that he was right, because now I recalled the scene again, from beyond the mental picture of the scene in the book, I saw that particular dead lamb in my mind, and it must have been at least two or three days old, as its wool was dry and dingy, not wet and yellowy. "Thanks: that's the sort of criticism one wants. Facts all the time."

Thereupon Percy the farmer began to apologise for his suggestion, saying he was no critic, but that's how it occurred to him, and he hoped I wouldn't think him presumptuous, etc. etc. Pickles was pleased that his two friends seemed to like each other, and it was arranged that I should have the horse for a nearby meet of foxhounds after Christmas.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve we all went for a walk, I pushing the perambulator containing Priscilla. Pickles' greyhound Lightning bounded over the marshy grazing meadows, putting up duck, and once a hare. Lightning returned instantly at his master's shrill whistle, cut from a piece of stag's-horn. Lightning was a beautiful dog, and I wished I had brought Billjohn the spaniel with me. Devon seemed far away and unreal, and I thought of Julian and Irene, and the brilliant glittering of the late sun over Lundy, and the sea milky azure, so smooth, and of summer's everlasting light—and all was gone forever.

"Tired, Willie?"

"No—just thinking."

"Bad habit, thinking. You come and drive one of my Austin tractor ploughs after Christmas: easy money for me,—one acre, two hours, one pound. I'll show them to you tomorrow. Do you want to go to church?"

"No, thanks, not particularly."

"Nor do I. Remember the old church parades? And how you always tried to dodge them, Willie? Saying you were a sun-worshipper, or a Mahomedan, or something. And how bored the padre was when you wrote that poem called 'The Nazarene', beginning, 'His tears are clouds these many centuries', and going on to say how the rain fell alike on the Hun and ourselves, both fighting for the same cause?"

We had a good tea, Lightning, the long sinewy dog, lying before the fire. I hoped Billjohn was happy at the Higher House, and Pie happy all alone in her cottage. Would she be sitting on the corner of the table, watching the door, or be sitting on the window-sill?

After dinner that night we lay in firelit ease, listening to an Elgar *Concerto* on the gramophone, then to *Tristan and Isolde*, then to Grieg. It was lovely to lie back, with eyes closed, my mind just this side of sleeping, vacant of self, while the music flowed through me: the music that was hope and prayer and dream, which were eternal forces in sky, water, rock, and sun.

I, too, must go the lonely way, I, too, was of hope and prayer and dream, and one day I would reveal—O Grieg, O Jefferies, O Wagner, they too knew the feeling of rising to and being of the sky forever, while yet the heart ached with its incommunicable burden in solitude.

"Whiskey and soda, old man?"

"No whiskey and soda, thanks."

"Really? My dear old man——"

"Well, it doesn't agree with me really, Pickles. Thanks all the same."

"Just a spot!"

"Er—thanks."

"That's better, Willie! Remember that binge on rum with the Canadians at Abeele?"

"Yes, by God, they were the days, Pickles."

We finished the bottle between us, and went to bed about one o'clock on Christmas morning, feeling that we were again of War's meteoric timelessness and comradeship.

It was hard to realise it was Christmas Day. I thought of Mother and Father, and felt somewhat sad. Pickles' cook-general had arrived only the day before; she had been a W.A.A.C. during the War, and had worked in a laundry; she had done her best; but the turkey arrived on the table with head and legs still attached. The head and withered neck lay in a splash of gravy, in an attitude of weariest resignation. It was a merry meal after the second glass of Burgundy. The next day I drove a tractor, which Pickles said cost seven hundred and fifty pounds, through the garden fence.

Uneasy thoughts arose in me before the meet of foxhounds. I recalled what the young farmer had said of the chestnut's vice of shying. Then, Pickles, suddenly becoming horsey, told me, with a straw in his mouth, that "the 'oss would pull well", since his pal Percy that morning had given it a feed of six pounds of oats and chaff. Wearing a pot hat, grey coat made from an Army blanket of Harris tweed—one of a dozen I had brought away in 1919 from the Dispersal Unit in Folkestone as part of the spoils of war—field boots, featherweight racing spurs, and light fawn twill cavalry breeches, and carrying a brutal-looking whip with loaded egg-shaped handle (1915, monocle-swagger, sloppy trench-cap period) I adjusted the unsoaped leathers to the correct length from finger-tips to armpit, pretended to look over bit and bridle while actually seeing nothing but the white-rolling nigger-eye of my hunter, and putting left foot in the rusty iron, swung myself into the saddle.

The meet lay two miles distant. I had already memorised it

from a study of the 1-inch Ordnance map. I set off, waving my skullcracker whip airily, while recalling that I had not been astride a horse for nearly two years: and making a mental note, for a book, that the inside flanks of the thighs of a man who rides regularly are smooth as though shaven, however bearlike he may be elsewhere, I trotted sedately along the road. At that period of my literary career nearly all my active sensuous energy was absorbed in thinking how various objects could be described in order to present their living actuality in print.

Now I was on a thin, rakish-looking uncertain horse which most noticeably was suffering from indigestion; and my thigh muscles were beginning to tremble with the unaccustomed position.

The country was flat, the watery furrows of the ploughlands on either side deeply turned and neatly laid. We passed a clump of willows grown for cricket bats. The horse seemed all right, sprightly rather than lively. Its mouth was not hard, and it responded to the usual aids. I set my hat more firmly on my head.

A traction engine with threshing box was trundling towards me, about a hundred yards ahead. The road was narrow, with deep ditches on either side, water in them. I noticed, then forgot it; for as the smoky apparition approached my hack began to issue more evidence of its dyspeptic state. A coincidence, I hoped, for its ears were not more than normally vertical. I was wishing that I had included a comic foxhunting scene in my book, Willie Maddison on a pony hired from gipsies and Jack mounted on a donkey, when the sky suddenly slanted up and the traction engine slid down from view. How I managed to keep my seat I did not know, for the chestnut had reared and toppled sideways into the ditch, describing two parabolas with its forelegs. It stood wedged in the deep clay ditch, withers quivering and nostrils distended, while in a fervently conciliating voice I talked to it, patting its neck and wondering what it would do next. The ditch was quite five feet deep. It stood there until the engine had passed, and then violently scrambled out, myself still on its back. I found I was smiling at a young girl wearing a black soft felt hat and black coat, astride a grey hunter, walking towards me. If she were going to the meet of the Essex pack, then I had missed the turning. I decided to ask her, with hat correctly raised.

"This way," she smiled. She had white even teeth, brown eyes, and fresh cheeks.

"Gosh, I thought this brute was going to roll on me." I hadn't thought that, yet it seemed true. "No, actually I didn't think that. It's a war correspondent's attitude. I thought nothing at the time, only felt mild surprise. This is a borrowed beast," I said, despising myself for wanting to appear superior to the poor mount and rusty irons.

"Mine is borrowed, too," she said, as our eyes met in a frank gaze. I felt suddenly very pleased with life: an adventure.

We trotted to the meet together. My companion was calm, and very pretty. I judged her to be a schoolgirl of about sixteen; that she did not hunt regularly, by the cut of her boots, which were too large round the calves. Her dark breeches, too, looked ready-made. I rammed my hat on the back of my head, feeling myself a reg'lar top-sawyer over the timber—until I remembered the shaggy ungroomed coat and long sweeping tail under me. I set my hat at a more sedate angle.

Hounds were grouped against an old barn wall of weathered oak and brick. Brown collars to the pink uniforms, the usual lean small huntsman with red hacksaw features and marvellous polish of thin boots, sitting as though he had grown into his horse. Apparently the girl knew none of the faces. She sat quietly there, composed, aloof but not shy, looking around with frank eyes. Anxious lest she should think I was trying to make an impression on her, which I admitted to myself I was trying to do, I remained aloof yet alert near her, but neither looking at her directly nor speaking to her. A tall woman on foot in a grey coat and skirt, and carrying a blackthorn thumb-stick, moved among the horses and stood by the grey's head. "Hullo, Annabelle, it's a big field, isn't it? How's The Learned Pig behaving?"

"I like him, Mummie. Whcre's Queenie?"

"She's with the General." The newcomer and I exchanged glances. I began a search for my cigarette case, in the flap of my new yellow waistcoat.

We moved off. A fox was found in the middle of a ploughed field, in a slight depression. The chestnut was quickly wet with sweat. When put to a big thorn fence, it refused to jump, to my relief. Soon I was one of a straggling cavalcade seeking gaps and gateways. Taking my own line after awhile, I found myself in

a rectangular field of pasture shut in by high hedges and a wired ditch. There was one gap, which might have been used by bullocks, and labourers. A path about two and a half feet wide was worn down both of the steep clay banks. Red cow-hair was caught in the smoothed trunks of the two thorns beside the aperture. The girl in the soft black hat was cantering with others across the adjoining field. I put my horse at the gap, and pulled him off; it was more than a risk, to expect an untrained animal to descend five feet at an angle of 30 degrees, then ascend the other slope of the V. It could not be flown, owing to branches level with the horse's nose. The girl was about to jump a low quick-set hedge three hundred yards distant. Damn! I thrust the chestnut at the gap, lay along its neck, kicked with my heels, while wondering if my skull would be stove in by a broken horizontal branch polished as by the polls of bullocks. My mount gave some sort of a spring, and I was jerked and thrown about; a violent dig in my offside ribs which made me gasp with pain; and as the horse went down on its knees I went over its ears and was tipped neatly on to the grass of the further bank. Rapidly I rolled myself out of forefeet plunging hammer-like by my head. I watched the horse getting out of the ditch, and then deliberately getting down again to roll: there it was rolling, the damned thing: and with a loud noise of stitch and wind breaking simultaneously, it scrambled upright once more, leaving the saddle, dry and torn inside like several layers of compressed brown paper, on the ground.

"That suits me if it suits you," I said, and somewhat amazed at my temerity, I seized the bridle, hopped in preparation of vaulting, and flung myself across its scurfy back. .

Thereafter the horse seemed to fly over the ground, tail streaming behind, impressed sods flung out from its heels. My legs were long, the nag's action was light and even, so that balance was even. If I slipped off, I slipped off. The chestnut took the quick-set hedge in its stride, clearing a ditch on the other side. I had to dismount to open the next gate, while wishing that my whip handle had been of serrated stag's-horn, to lift up the iron latch. Steady boy, steady! He was off at a canter with myself lying across him, my arms round his neck as I tried to work my right leg over his back. In front was another fence. I was falling—no—I was hanging with both arms around his

neck. He stopped, quivering, red in eye and nostril. After mounting, I walked him a score of paces from the fence, turned his head round, touched him with the spur, and urged him to the jump. Somehow we crashed through. Across another plough was a small copse, with a road beyond, on which several motor-cars were standing. He plunged across the furrows in a wide staggering trot, as though drawing a gig in a race. We went down a path through the copse, and through a gate to the road. I pretended not to hear the whistles and laughter of small boys and youths. Pickles and his wife were standing by the motorcycle and sidecar. They grinned at my appearance.

"You *would*," said Pickles.

I felt myself to be a character, and rammed my hat on the back of my head. "Which way did they go, Pickles?"

"West, old boy, where you'll go if you're not careful." He pointed across a field. "The fox ran that way: I think hounds must have changed. Poor little brute, its tongue was hanging out and its brush thick with mud. And you call yourself a nature lover!" he said amiably.

"See you later, old boy! Steady, 'oss!"

The hedge was thin, not more than two feet high. Too late I perceived the ditch on the other side. The horse saw it first, and stopped abruptly. Very slowly, as in a slow-motion film, I was going down over its head, examining with detachment the reflection of my face in the water. Grinning faces greeted me as I crawled out, my back cricked, my wrists and knees and elbows wet, my hat dented and splashed with mud. Someone cheered ironically. "You damned well have a shot at it!" I shouted in sudden rage, and grinned hysterically as they yelled with laughter. "It serves you right, that will help to cool your blood lust!" cried an angry female voice, as I shoved myself through the hedge. "You inhuman brutes, I'd like to see you all flogged!"

"Ah, an idealist!" I cried, raising my hat, and they laughed again.

"Have a drink," said Pickles, offering me his flask.

"Thanks, old boy."

I took a swig, surrounded by amused faces. "I'll fly that fence," I muttered, feeling happy and bold. "Hark!"

Yes, hounds were giving tongue in the distance. It sounded like a breast-high scent.

"Come on, Dick Turpin!" shouted a voice when I was mounted again, and, before I could protest, a long whippy hazel stick sharply struck the horse's hindquarters. With a backward dyspeptic protest from the horse, causing another roar of laughter, we were over and away.

By good luck I came upon the line hounds were running after I had gone through only three gates. The crick, or torn muscle in my back, became more painful. For two miles riding was an agony. At every undulation of the canter a splinter of glass seemed to push into my spine, and I held my breath to press against the pain. Rider after rider passed me on strong, tall, well-muscled hunters. My poor hack was showing fatigue, it was dark with sweat, its tail was ropy with mud. His heart was willing; but grass feeding was not enough. He collapsed slowly, and sat in the mud. After a while I got him to his feet, and walked him, glad of the excuse. Before us the clamour of the kill arose dully into the damp winter air. Tall masts of the Chelmsford wireless station stood beyond hedges. Men and women were dismounted in a circle. I walked towards them, and came upon a most curious sight.

Hounds were within the circle, with the pink-coated huntsman, and the two whips, swinging thongs, keeping them away from something.

It was the fox. It stood motionless. One forefoot was advanced. Its fangs were bared. Its eyes gleamed. Only its brush lifted gently, as though with pleasure. No hound was nearer than three yards. It stood between huntsman and whip, facing south. I watched for a minute, for two minutes. The fox never moved; the snarl was fixed; it stared straight ahead. Gently, very gently, the upper hairs of the muddy brush lifted and fell with the wind.

"If only I had a camera," said a voice.

"I've never seen such a thing before," a man replied. Hounds were baying. Still the fox stood on the grass.

Men and women seemed to take no notice of the peculiar sight, as they ate sandwiches, and took swigs from saddle flasks.

The fox fell over and lay still.

I realised it was dead. Run stiff. Muscles set. Nerves not working. It lay on the grass as though frozen.

Then someone told me that a single hound, Hemlock, had killed the fox in the ditch over there; the hunt servants whipped

off the pack to prevent him being eaten; and rigor mortis had set in immediately. The huntsman had put the fox on its pads; and thus it was standing when the field arrived.

I led my hack home. The girl I had spoken to, with the old-fashioned name, Annabelle, overtook me, at a slow trot. I was glad to see her; her face was vivid and pretty. "A good run!" she smiled.

"Yes, but I'm sorry for the wretched fox."

"Then why do you come out?" she called over her shoulder, as she trotted on again. Yes, why had I come out.

A minute or two later a young girl with blue eyes and fair hair, in a dark blue habit, passed with a man in ratcatcher. Did she give me a glance as she passed? Her cheeks too were flushed, her eyes shone. Her companion was keen-faced, and his hair was going grey above the ears; he seemed preoccupied, yet attentive in a serious way to what she was saying.

It occurred to me that this was the man referred to by Annabelle's mother as the General, and that he was in love with the fair girl, who was probably Queénie. They trotted ahead, and I limped on, wondering if I could find again the place where the saddle had been left: oh hell, why had I gone foxhunting so ridiculously. I longed for Julian's astringent comments; but Julian was gone from my life.

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Three months later, to the day, I opened my cottage door again. It had not been locked when I went away. Locks were scorned as things originating from fear, pettiness, and suspicion. I lifted the latch, and the first thing I saw was wall-space against which my teak and pitch-pine logs had been piled when I had left. There was rust on my Norton, whose tyres were flat. There was mildew on my saddle, boots, and books. There was a little furry cat-skeleton curled wan-eyed on my bed. A saucer-like depression lined with fur showed where it had slept, and a track of feet was defined on the dusty floor. My poor little Pie! She weighed scarcely more than a pound. Her thigh bones were sharp through her skin. Her eyes dreamed wildly, she opened her mouth and meow'd with a faint rattle.

Revvu the out-of-work labourer said that Biell the spaniel had come down from the Higher House once every day, and sniffed at the cat-hole in the door, wagging his tail, and whining. At the sound of a motorcycle, he was instantly alert, stopping his breathing, and listening with ears cocked. Once a fast motor-bike, looking just like mine, declared Revvu, passed through the village, and "old Biell rinned all th' way to Crosstree", being brought back by the police sergeant. I went to the Higher House, arriving in time to be invited to Albert the landlord's table, and eat of baked stuffed rabbit, roast green bacon, carrots, "tetties", cabbage, and drink a pint of sixpenny. My dog stared at my arrival, then whined, looked strangely at me, and thereupon appeared to forget me. He whined occasionally during the eating, seeming reluctant to come near me. It was the reaction of the months of waiting and dreaming; now he felt strange, purposeless, bewildered. I knew so well that feeling. I made much of Billjohn afterwards, rolling on the floor with him and pretending to growl and bite his throat. He knew that game; and after uttering a melancholy howl, he went wild with joy, running round the room and panting with long narrow tongue a-flack. That night he and Pie slept on my bed, the cat wheezing and trilling internally after her meal of rabbit scrap. I told myself I would not leave them again.

I lay there unsleeping, a sense of forlornness coming silently in the night. Startlingly loud were the hours clanged from the church tower. The streamlet murmured with its darkness murmur: the running murmur of water that came only in the night-time, when the village slept. It was so still, so quiet in the small dim room, with its old worn floorboards and thick dry walls which had sheltered men and women since the thirteenth century. Almost could I hear the dust settling again on floor and jug and wooden hand-rail where my khaki tunics hung damp and creaseless. The stream was singing its night-song, running past stone and shard and through culvert on its way down the valley to the sea. Stars shone in the little pools. The stream was flowing to the sea even as my life was flowing to that strange sea beyond time in which were sunken, for ever and for ever, the unknown men and women who had lain, even as I was lying, in this dim quiet hollow room. The thought of their hopes and dreams now gone beyond the silence of dust, beyond

memory and the unthinkable mystery of night, was piercing in its sadness, and the tears streamed silently by my mouth and my ears to the pillow.

Slowly the stars moved past the casement window, wanderers to what unknown infinity. The starlight was so pale, so remote, so beyond all human cries to heaven. I lay on my elbow, trying to think myself beyond the personal life; for that life was vacant as before. I was away from myself, living no more in the present, but now in the past sadly, now flying to a future brightness where Annabelle clasped me, and my self was lost in her beauty, merged with her self evermore in aerial raptness beyond imagining, beyond the sky's sweet azure of day and star-streaming darkness.

Yet though I knew myself to be hopelessly in love with Annabelle, the mocker, my longing was still for what my mind saw as a mother-maiden, whose arms would fold around me, and by whose cherishing I would lose the fatigue of the past and present. The love of my mother, whose sensibility and tenderness I had inherited, had been part of my life until I had first returned from Flanders with frozen feet, dysentery, and the shock of realising that death and suffering were the realities of life. Love for my mother had gone from my life like a limb blown off by high explosive, the stump charred by permanganate of potash; I was nearly always irritable with my mother, whose patience and sweetness was exasperating—but now, far away and in the water-rillet silence of midnight, tears fell anew for my defection.

Arising from sleeplessness, I lit the candle, rapidly filled several pages with writing, addressed an envelope, and went in my pyjamas and leather coat to the post office with the letter to my mother, Pie purring in my arms and the spaniel following behind.

In bed again, I breathed deeply; but sleep would not come. Two o'clock struck. All my money was gone, hiring hunters at three guineas a day—but by God, as Julian would say, I had seen life. How rude I had been to Pickles, using his place as an hotel, going out after breakfast and usually returning when they were in bed. But had I been rude? Pickles had said, *I understand, Willie. Carry on, old boy. Good luck.* I was in love with Annabelle, and Annabelle's mother was in love with me. Everything had been light and easy until Pickles' remark, *She's got a crush on*

you, old boy. What, Sophy? Oh, rot! She's just an extraordinarily nice woman, Pickles. *I don't doubt it, Willie: but if she suspects that you love young Annabelle, well—* Thereafter hearing had dominated sight in their presence. My ears were alert, my eyes made blank. Of course, I was poor, I hadn't a hope with Annabelle. Had not Spica's mother stopped it abruptly, when it was obvious that I loved Spica? I perceived subtleties in remarks which, heard otherwise, would have been unremarkable. For hours I treated Annabelle with easy indifference; but I could not maintain this attitude, and when alone with her, to reveal my feeling for her, I read poems of Shakespeare's thirtieth sonnet, Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, and poems of John Donne and Francis Thompson. I read with an emotion I could not suppress, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*—it was my own prayer. Seeing this, Annabelle would come and stand by me, and put her arm round my shoulders—the arm that bowled at school cricket and slogged the boundaries. Annabelle's eyes darkly burned with grave spirit. Once her elder sister Queenie had come unexpectedly into the room, and I shut the book and thrust it into my pocket. Queenie saw, and smiled slightly. *What a very intellectual atmosphere our house is acquiring*, she remarked, in her neat, quiet voice. I looked tenderly at Annabelle as Queenie left the room. *Take it off!* Annabelle cried gaily, meaning the expression of my face. *Annabelle, come for a walk. Why should I go for a walk with a solemn old owl? Besides, I don't want to hear any more of that stuff. But Annabelle, I—I—* *Take it off! But Annabelle, don't you see how beautiful it is! Listen, Annabelle, oh, please listen.*

And I deem well why life unshared Was ordained me of yore.
In pairing-time, we know, the bird Kindles to its deepmost splendour,
And the tender Voice is tenderest in its throat: Were its love,
for ever nigh it, Never by it, It might keep a vernal note,
The crocean and amethystine In their pristine Lustre linger on its coat.
Therefore must my song-bower lone be, That my tone be Fresh with dewy pain alway.

You and Old Botty would get on well together. I'll introduce you. Come back, don't walk away. It's rude. Shall I introduce you to your soul-mate, Old Botty? Who's Old Botty? English Literature mistress. She's quite cracked. Like you. Sorry I can't stop any longer. I'm playing golf at eleven. Who are you playing with? Oh, Peter. Very well, play. Nice fellow, Peter. Extremely nice fellow. You like him, do you? Very much.

Hullo, Mother. Hullo. Good morning, Willie. Annabelle dear, Peter's just arrived. How long have you been here, Willie? The young people are playing golf this morning, apparently. Shall we go for a walk? Been writing any more animal stories? Yes, I think I must go now and do some more. But you've only just come! How very busy you are all of a sudden. Yes, I wrote two yesterday. How quickly you write. What are they about? One is about an old man and a mouse, the other about a peregrine falcon and some pigeons. You must read them to me—have you got them here? You bet he's got them, Mother! You came just in time, in another moment he would have read them to me. That would have been worse than poetry! Take him for a walk, Mother. Would you like to walk, Willie? You'll stay to lunch of course? The General's coming. You like him, don't you? Yes, but thanks all the same, Sophy, I think really that I ought to see Pickles—— He says that every day, doesn't he, Mummie? Of course he'll stay to lunch, tea, and dinner. But, Mother, take that book from his pocket and hide it until he goes. He'll be wearing his hair long next! It's going grey already——. Don't heed the child, Willie. She doesn't mean half she says. Don't I! G'bye, Willie! Morning, Peter, just coming. You've met our Tame Author, haven't you, Peter? You ought to write a poem called Willie and His Wild Hunter—and send it to Punch. Run along, Annabelle. Come on, William, let's leave the young people to their own ideas.

So we set off, I trying to talk lightly, while a heaviness as of the clay ploughlands pressed on my heart. *Listen, Willie, the first lark!* Sophy's voice trembled, her eyes shone, she was like the conventional young girl of poetry, so dewy-eyed, slender, and young. But the first lark meant nothing to me, without Annabelle. Sophy's hand resting on the blackthorn thumb-stick was sensitive, with long thin fingers. *Don't let silly editors worry you. You'll be famous one day. I wasn't thinking of that, actually, Sophy.* The sigh escaped before it could be checked. *Then you must be in love, boy! Who is she? Do I know her? Is it my little Annabelle? Good lord, no! She's only a child. M'yes, but she's beginning to be a woman also. Anyhow, don't let her ragging upset you. She's too young to understand poetry, and things like that. Besides, she's not the poetical sort; she wants to be doing things, all the time. Well anyhow, my dear, if I can help in any way, remember I am your friend. Thanks very much.* Sophy blushed faintly, and we walked on. Eight weeks ago.

Lying in bed, my legs bent round the still weight of dog and little purring cat, I relived fragments of words and scenes in a

turmoil of hope and mortification. Queenie and the General, whom they called Bay. He wrote her letters, enclosing verses. *Do you know this poetry, Willie?* asked the demure, sleek-gold-haired Queenie, with her delicate features and innocent blue eyes which gave quick shy glances at men. *Yes, W. B. Yeats! Did Bay say he wrote it? No, he just sent it. I say, don't give me away, will you, Annabelle? Don't say I asked you, Willie. And for goodness' sake don't let on that I'm unofficially engaged to Bay, whatever you do. Poor old Bay, I'm sorry for him.* Queenie's eyes were bright, her cheeks were flushed, whenever the General came to the house. The General was usually cordial, sometimes brotherly, always most courteous to me. His greying hair was dark with oil, and well brushed. He was a widower, with a daughter as old as Queenie, and, I understood, at a finishing school in Paris. Once as I walked to the house through the rose garden I came unexpectedly upon the General and Queenie. The General looked unhappy. Queenie was flushed, very demure and wistful. *I'm going away, I can't bear it any more*—I heard the General saying, and then they saw me. *Good morning, sir,* I cried, hurrying past them, *I'm looking for the greyhound—have you seen him? He ran after a hare!* Queenie had looked at me like that, demure, bright-eyed, when first I had come to the house. I had read poetry to her, Walter de la Mare's *Fare Well*, which was in a recent anthology by J. C. Squire which Julian had bought and not paid for—and which I had filched from Irene's cottage after his departure, as a souvenir of dear old Julian. The letter written to me by Walter de la Mare had been stuck into the book, folded and hinged. *Let me see it,* Queenie had said once. *Oh, Willie, it's lovely poetry. You don't really like it, Queenie. Do you, honestly?* She gave me a wide-eyed, sad smile. *I do, Willie, really I do.* I took the book from her. *You don't!* I said feeling a stir of pain, or hope, in my heart. *I do,* she cried, snatching the book. The letter was torn in two. *Oh, I'm so sorry, Willie! Doesn't matter. It was my fault. You look so pretty, Queenie.* Had I dared to say that, I thought in alarm. *Honestly, do you like it, Queenie? It's heavenly,* sighed Queenie, looking into my eyes. Ten minutes later the General walked in. Queenie sprang up and left me, and I might never have been in the room alone with her, by the way she ignored me. I had no further desire to read poetry to Queenie. Seven weeks ago.

Through the thin white wall came the snores of my neighbour Revvy. It was three o'clock. Four years ago at this very hour I was being roused by an orderly, in the strangely quiet darkness of night and the moving ray of an electric torch, giving me a telegram signed BRAMBLE, and two other words which shocked and thrilled me. It had come at last. BATTLE STATIONS. The mist, the terrific barrage, uncertainty, retreat, petrol dumps billowing black smoke, low strafing Fokkers and Albatri, Candas. Four years ago, a whole world away, gone forever. Now it was 21 March, 1922—the first day of Spring! I felt I had betrayed Jefferies, because I had scarcely thought of the spring this year until now, but only of Annabelle's brown eyes and neck and dark hair. Once, after a day's hunting, I had walked upstairs to wash, and had opened my bathroom door, surprised to find Annabelle in the bath. I saw a sponge upheld, and the loveliest face and shoulders and arms over the rim of the bath; and the pink-petal breasts, sleek with water; her hair in a dark knot. Annabelle's even white teeth and smile, her shout of GET OUT! and the sponge hurled with a watery splash at my apologetic and precipitantly retiring self. Downstairs I paced about alone, thinking of her young beauty, her apple-blossom loveliness. Dinner that evening was great fun, and there was much laughter, and Queenie saying continually, *Oh, you are an ass, Willie!* while Annabelle was silent, her brown eyes smouldering and abstract. *Annabelle, dear, you are so tired, do go to bed. In a minute, Mummie.* Annabelle got up, kissed her mother good-night, said *Goodnight, Willie*, and went out. Her cheeks burned. I felt everything was unreal. Queenie and the General were away in the billiard room, where occasionally and remotely came the sound of snooker balls in clash. Annabelle came back a minute later, standing at the half open door. *I can't find any matches, Willie, please get me some*, she said quickly, and went away. I hastened out of the room. Annabelle was standing in shadow. She appeared not to see me, as though everything was unreal to her. Somehow our hands met. *Goodnight*, she breathed, leaning till our lips touched; we shared a slight sigh and then she was gone in the darkness, and I was returning as though in a dream to the drawing room. *Well, I think we're all tired tonight, so if you don't mind I'll go to bed*, said Sophy. I was staying in the house; I hunted three times a week, bathing, changing, dining, and

sleeping at Tollemer Park afterwards. *Don't you bother to go up yet awhile. Help yourself to a peg if you want one, and put out the lights, won't you?—Queenie has gone to bed, I expect. Goodnight.*

Left alone, I helped myself to what was, I realised, the stiff peg of fiction, and drank to my own immense and secret satisfaction. *By God, Harry, it's a poor heart that never rejoices*, I said to myself in Julian's gruff tones. That night I could not sleep for the sweet happiness that one moment seemed to dissolve my body, the next to fill it with an ache of restlessness perpetuated by my startlingly clear mind. I could not sleep, I did not want to sleep; but I slept, to awake with determination to tell Annabelle that I loved her with all my life.

But in the morning Annabelle was changed. She refused to go for a walk. When I went near her as she was mixing a feed from the bins in the harness room, she darted away, and said when I got to her, *I'll slosh you if you don't keep your distance*. She was unapproachable. I felt myself beginning to ache with dragging heaviness. *What has happened, Annabelle, have I done anything? Look in a mirror, and you'll see*. The fellow called Peter, a confident and superior gunner cadet on leave from The Shop, appeared at that moment; and the cold clay of the ploughlands lay on my hopes again. Annabelle was Queenie's sister. Poor old General, called Bay by the others, I was sorry for him. I was sorry for myself too, because I was formless and a bore, so I made an excuse to leave before lunch.

For three days I remained in Pickles' house, writing a book the idea of which had come to me at Christmas. After the third day I could write no more, I must see Annabelle, but as I got near the house I felt my determination dissolving. I forced myself to continue walking up the drive, while my breast seemed filled with ice, and I sweated coldly. To my immense relief I was welcomed by everyone, even the cocker spaniels and the terriers—one of which, a brute who always growled and kicked hindlegs on carpet, lawn, or drive when he saw me, came up to me with hackles raised and deliberately cocked his leg against my new tweed plus-fours, which had just been delivered from a tailor in Chelmsford. I explained that the natural grease had been left in the wool, and the dog was therefore not altogether blameworthy; moreover, I was grateful to him for his restraint in not biting me. It was good to laugh with them all, and I de-

terminated to keep to the level of that moment. Annabelle came to talk to me, asking where I had been, and my replies were light, easy, and evasive. Her eyes that evening were dark and reflective. Sent to bed, she returned, *Willie, I don't think you put my motorbike back in the garage, did you? Yes, and I also thanked me on your behalf*, I replied, without looking up from the book I pretended to be reading. I had taken her motorcycle to be decarbonised in Chelmsford. The door closed silently.

Ah, how weak and foolish I had been! The thought of my weakness, the formlessness to which my feelings for Annabelle had reduced me, made me clench my hands, thrust my head into the pillow, vainly seeking to escape the procession of thoughts and desires. Annabelle was merely sorry for me; and I had mistaken her feeling, and therefore taken advantage of her loving kindness! Oh God, I couldn't bear it. Four o'clock struck. Soon cocks would be crowing in the ghastly dawn.

*O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,*

*Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.*

I got out of bed, put on my trousers, socks, shoes, British Warm, and went out of my cottage. The dog followed. Light filtered on wall and thatch and road from a clear sky cold with stars. There was a path leading up to the fields over rock, to a stile, across fifty yards of pasture, and then to the larger field called Netherhams. Here the north-east wind made a scything sound in dead thistles and grasses, and through the distortion of watery eyes I saw Orion and Sirius low above the southern horizon.

It was so cold, and I ran down the field to the gate near the school garden, and along the lane to the village again. The spaniel was away chasing rabbits. I must hope for nothing personal; dedicate all my life and faith to the work I was destined to do. Annabelle's life was not my life, and I knew it. I began speaking lines of Thompson's *Hound of Heaven* to myself:

*Ah! must—
Designer infinite!—
Ah! must Thou char the wood ere
Thou canst limn with it?*

No! I cried. It is unnatural: for the god of golden song is also god of the golden sun. I know crucifixion and sacrifice is wrong. In future I will be furious because Jesus was done to death by stupidity, which made of that crime a religion of Innocence tortured to save Ignorance! I will not say *Oh my God*, but *God damn it!*

The cottage was dark and still with nothingness. I mixed two teaspoonfuls of liver salts in a glass of water, and drank it down. With knees near my chin, I lay in bed, huddling into myself for warmth and companionship. Below at the door the spaniel whined. He was too big now to squeeze through the cat-hole. He whimpered for several minutes, then I forced myself out of bed and downstairs to open the door. Come in, blast you! Keep by me another time, or you'll be shut out. He crept in, back curved, nigger-eyed, slow as a tortoise. Hurry up, damn you! I slung him a couple of yards with my bare foot. He flopped hurriedly into my armchair. Get out, curse you! His tail beat violently, he swallowed spittle, he remained in my armchair. Oh, you awful ass, Biell! Come upstairs, you idiot! At the changed tone of voice he ran to me, leaping up. I suppose that's how Annabelle regards me! You and I are both helplessly soppy. Come on, dog, up up up!

There was relief in lying on my bed, breathing deeply and slowly. Why hadn't I practised deep breathing before? It seemed that I would never achieve serenity; from earliest childhood I had been the same. At the age of nine, memory said, there had begun what even then I had called "the battle of the brain". Was it because of a childhood lived under a perpetual cloud of dread, which often was acute terror of my father? In the books I had written that dread and terror had been much modified; in fact, Willie Maddison had been happy and care-free compared with myself.

Sophy had read my book. Her criticism of Maddison was, *He's deceitful, and a coward; a real person all right; but you needn't think you're like him, because you're not. You're ever so much nicer than*

your book hero! But most boys are deceitful, surely, under such circumstances? I don't pretend to know about those sorts of boy, but I don't think a gentleman's sons would behave as your boys behaved. Sophy had other criticisms to make, too; personal criticisms, to improve me, as she said. What was it Sophy had said, *I don't think you ought to talk about things you don't understand. Your remarks about Our Lord are, apart from their falseness, in bad taste, my dear. You are the sort of person who, quite unwittingly, I admit, would help to cause His crucifixion were He to come on earth a second time.*

For the next two days I had walked alone, when not writing in my Diary scenes for the last book of the tetralogy, eating little, having no hunger or desire for food. *Don't let what she or anyone else says get under your skin,* said Pickles. *You can't expect fireside patriots to know what happened in the War; any more than pew-kneelers, because they are pew-kneelers, can understand what happened to Jesus the human being.* I bought a Valentine card for Annabelle; but I did not post it. Six weeks ago.

The prone position and slow inspiration-respiration seemed no help. Billjohn was snoring. I kicked him as hard as I could, hurting my toe, and causing only a grunt from him. He shifted, swallowed spittle, and then set his neck comfortably on my aching toe. I scratched his neck through the blanket; he sighed with pleasure. Ah well, experience had shown me that all things passed. Where was Spica now? I winced away from the memory of her last letter, sent with the return of the typescript of the second book. Spica didn't like Maddison either. He seemed unreal to her. *Somehow I can't imagine Maddison eating and enjoying a good plateful of roast mutton.* I wrote back asking Spica to wait and read the other book, which I was writing. Surely she would understand then? Spica replied that she was awaiting it eagerly, especially to see how Eve Fairfax had been treated. *She's a rotter, that woman, and I hope you see it now, Willie.*

I recalled how Eve and I had come to this cottage two and a half years before, in August 1919. There not being a chaperone available—anyway, I did not care—she had come as my sister-in-law, and I had invented a wife for myself, who had just died. I told the post-mistress and others who knew me during my first visit in 1914 and again in 1916 that my “wife”, married in 1918, had recently died in child-birth. To one sympathetic villager I had described my fictitious wife's imagined death so

vividly that my voice had weakened and my eyes brimmed with tears. Some had remarked the strangeness of seeing tears in a young widower's eyes one moment, and hearing him singing songs like *The Trumpeter* and *The Bandolero* at the top of his voice in the cottage the next moment. And the quarrels with the sympathetic sister-in-law! In memory I saw again the plates of food, which I had usually cooked, flung violently by her over the garden wall, because I had said something to annoy her.

Then she would be merry and laughing again, and looking at me with her brilliant smile and sparkling eyes under her masses of auburn hair. By God, I had behaved very badly indeed, and my attitude must have been most aggravating. Now she was arising again in my life, in the pages of my book. How Porky had hugged himself when I had read some of the early chapters to him. *She's gorgeous, old boy, she's gorgeous, go on go on go on! get on with the goo' work, dear boy! Dam fine book.* Porky had changed towards me since reading my published novel. *A lovely book, a lovely book, didn't think you had it in you, Harry, old boy, lovely, I tell you, Jim and Dolly beautiful, beautiful, and little Willie, I can just see him, cute little beggar, congratulations, dear boy, never enjoyed a book so much since Hewlett's "Forest Lovers".* No more drink was pressed upon me thereafter by Porky. Dear old Porky, I must go and see him in the morning. He lived soberly nowadays, in his cottage by the sea, after 10s. in the pound had been paid by his trustees. Dear old Porky, I must see him.

A cock crowed from the farmyard opposite. Then a throaty, bubbling cry from the churchyard, *skirr-rr-rr*. My lovely owls were still for me! By God, I would write again, I would avoid all human contacts in the future, lest I betray what the white owls symbolised! I would live only for my writing!

Suddenly my heart was free of its heaviness, the ice-water running from my eyes. Annabelle, good-bye, darling Annabelle, oh beauty of life and sun and dream. I sighed deeply, and slept.

THE faithful English spring was Annabelle; she was the green fields and the swallows. Annabelle was Venus shining in the western evening sky, Annabelle was the moving white clouds over the headland and their swift shadows on sands and sea below. All I saw and hoped for was Annabelle. Annabelle wrote one letter, from her school on the coast of Sussex, which Sophy forwarded, saying that the girls were not allowed to write directly to anyone except their immediate relatives. Sophy wrote to me about once a week, tender and friendly letters which I read somewhat bleakly. Sophy sent a copy of Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, with an inscription, ending with the words, *It might teach even you, O Wise Child, something about Woman*. Several times I tried to read the play; the hero seemed an awful fool and bore, though I realised that artificiality was necessary for the play's drama or suspense. I wrote and thanked Sophy for her gift, saying it was awfully good, and that the patience and steadfastness of the heroine merited a better man than that wooden-headed and selfish young Scot. My writing was stopped again.

Sophy wrote that she had an idea of renting a furnished house at the Bay during the summer months, and would I send the name and address of a good local house-agent? I sent it immediately, and wild with excitement at the thought of seeing Annabelle in the coming summer, and on these very sands, I wrote a letter to Sophy, telling her how I saw her kindness in the loveliness of spring. I wrote rapidly to Annabelle all the morning; and then, recalling past mortification, I felt a check; and tore up the letter.

Every morning when the gentle postman knocked on the door, and called up good morning in his soft hesitating voice, I waited for his footfalls to clump away before running downstairs to see what he had brought. Every morning I repeated to myself, *There will be nothing from Annabelle, so you will not be disappointed*. It was so; nothing from Annabelle. Something within me had to be strangled anew every morning, with the thought, *There will be nothing from Annabelle*. On the table, covered with a blanket in orderly-room fashion, lay my work of the night before. I turned to it as to a friend, reading eagerly, laughing at the

comic parts and telling myself how precise and true were the descriptions. One paragraph especially I thought the best in all literature, that of a water-wheel working, which Willie Maddison had watched on his last day before leaving for an office in London.

One morning the postman brought me a letter from my literary agent telling me that he had sold the story of the peregrine falcons to *The Pictorial Review* in America for five hundred dollars, and he enclosed a cheque for ninety-eight pounds. I leapt with joy, and rushed in to show the cheque to my neighbour; but she was out, scrubbing the school floors, and so I kept the great news to myself. Ninety-eight pounds! I had written several short stories during the winter, one about a badger, another of an otter, a third about a mouse, and other animals, and my agent had had good luck with them soon after my return, placing them with magazines like *The Royal*, *Pearson's*, *Pan*, and *The Storyteller*, for prices between twelve and twenty guineas. I had all the money I needed. But this was the first American sale, the first "big money". My agent asked if he might take fifteen per cent of the American receipts while he was "building me up over there", and I wrote back and told him to take any commission he thought fair.

At last, in the familiar handwriting, came the awaited report on Book Two of the tetralogy, from J. D. Beresford. I ripped open the envelope, and read the contents with beating heart. Was the book turned down?

My dear Williamson,

I am torn between the knowledge that you are badly in need of a firm criticism, and the fear of discouraging you; and if my attempted blend is unsuccessful write me down as a cantankerous fool whose judgment has been spoilt by too much reading of rotten MSS.

As to the general construction (and spirit) of "Dandelion Days", I will say very little. I am afraid that from the public's point of view, you will rather spoil the prospects of your market by this book. It is rather too like "The Beautiful Years" in essence, which means—I speak as a Library Subscriber—that you have been too long over Willie's adolescence. Don't start defending yourself on that score. I could do it just as well for you. I am speaking now as a L.S. The school is very well drawn,

but just a little overdone—a little too realistic. For your realism is infinitely more drastic than that of Wells or Bennett. Yours is the spirit of fact and theirs so often (always in Bennett's case) the comparatively unconvincing letter. However, let that go. What I really have to say is about style. You *must*—either in proof or on the MSS., preferably the latter—cut out vigorously those idiotic little Latin words “umbral” and “vesperal”—they are just boyishness. They don't do any work (“shadowed” is infinitely prettier and more expressive than the hideous “umbral”, for instance), and there is no point in using them other than the desire to show off. I know. I have an old commonplace book still that I wrote in when I was in the early twenties, and it is full of silly pedantries. Moreover, you sometimes don't get them right. For example, you say, “As confidence recrudesced”, and recrudescence means literally “getting sore again”. Does confidence ever do that? Anyway, that was not what you meant in the context.

Lastly, and this is the most essential of all, I do not like that famous passage about the water-wheel you quoted in your last letter to me. The opening is good, if a trifle overloaded, but this is bad: “Sometimes a swallow ragtailed and gracile passed through the fine spray upflung by the champèd waters, descanting on the silver plash and spilth of gold.” It is bad because it creates no picture. To get anything out of that purple passage one has to chew it over, when it should have been vivid, graphic, stirring the imagination in an instant. I don't want *in reading* your books to admire Mr. Williamson's cleverness. Let that come afterwards. I want to be transported. I want to live with Willie Maddison and in him; see things through his eyes, suffer with him. Those too elaborate tapestries prevent that. I lose the vision, in the presentation. I am more concerned with the words than the thought. Wherefore, I say that in a book of this kind your too too purple passage is bad prose because it is ineffective prose.

I know you will lose your temper, but I hope that when you have found it again, you will remember that I shouldn't have taken all this trouble if I had not thought you were worth it. Don't be too wrapped up in yourself. You've got a trifle too deep into the contemplation of H.W. down there in Devon. We are in town now, so if you come up, we could have an evening to-

gether—always supposing that you found your temper again by then.

Yours,
J. D. BERESFORD.

"But why ever should he think I should lose my temper?" I said aloud, as my neighbour's wife passed the open door, smiling.

"Oh, I thought you had company, Mr. Williamson."

"I have: there are seventy-four young wooden actresses all made of teak, somewhere, hidden about the place."

Mrs. Revvy laughed and passed on. She had often told me of my reputation for wildness in the village.

The carbon copy of the typescript of the book lay on the table. I opened it at the page describing the turning of the water-wheel. It had seemed very good to me when I had written it. I had spent many happy hours in the past searching through Roget's *Thesaurus* for strange and exciting words. *Gracile*, *descanting*, and *spilth* were from Francis Thompson. Mr. J. C. Squire recently had written me a letter saying the same thing about the word *brumal*, which had been used in the essay *Days of Autumn*, rejected by *The London Mercury*. It was hard to take out those rare words. And what had Walter de la Mare written about the use of such words, *rather as a man wears a diamond in a shirt-front*. I didn't know whether or not rich people wore diamonds in their shirt-fronts; bone studs once had seemed good enough for me. Well, my rule was, "when in doubt, leave out". With a sigh I crossed out the sentence, and wrote in the space between the lines: *Blue singing swallows passed through the spray, and to them all Willie whispered farewell*. But whyever should good old J. D. B. think I should lose my temper? Had I ever lost my temper in my life? Some things made me very happy, or very sad, or very upset, that was all. Having replied, I put his letter—which had not been typed, but written in his own hand—in my uniform case, to be treasured with others from famous writers.

The revised typescript having been sent off to the printers, it was time for a holiday. Every day the sun shone; every afternoon, carrying bread and butter and cake in my haversack, I went down to the sands, entering again summer's timeless life of sky and water.

I made friends with two middle-aged married people who

rented half the post-mistress's cottage opposite the church. To them in the evening I read my stories. My kind host was often facetious, ragging my seriousness: his wife was full of sensibility and charm, quiet because she was not very strong. With them I supped most nights, looking forward to their friendly faces and soft lamplit room, and sometimes taking presents of honey and eggs, not wanting to be thought a sponger. They were, I knew, made poor by the War, I took my trench gramophone over sometimes, and played favourite records of Grieg, Debussy, and Chopin. Their kindness seemed all the more generous because of my reputation for immorality and general bad-behaviour, ever since the parson's lady had found out that the sad account I had given her of my fictitious wife's imaginary death in childbirth had been entirely mendacious. I was made aware of this reputation during the autumn, after making friends with two young sisters who lived at the Bay, and who during their mother's absence had invited me to tea. I had gone in my best clothes, rather shy and diffident: and a few days later the younger sister had told me that someone in the district had written to her mother warning her of the great danger her girls ran by my presence with them alone in the house. The mother, when I met her, was frank and friendly to me, and asked me to go and see them whenever I wanted to, but I brooded on that letter, and felt an uneasiness whenever I went to see them. An accident occurred a few weeks later, that made me shy of local society for ever afterwards. Heavens, what an idiot I had been! How daft and stupid I was indeed! Oh, that Fancy Dress Dance in the next village, held in aid of some charity! Memory of that gave many inward writhings when the sun, that upheld me, had gone down beyond the sea. I had helped to fix up the ladies' dressing room—lending some of my army blankets; and when the work was done, it was suggested that, since I had worked so hard, I should come to the dance. Overcoming an inner reluctance, I went to the dance. How many times had I writhed in bed at night, remembering my sudden idiotic appearance at that dance, in home-made costume assembled from pyjamas, riding boots, leather jerkin, with my face white-washed and burnt-cork black circles round my eyes, a baby's woollen cap on my head stuck with two turkey feathers, and carrying in my mouth a moth-eaten lambskin tied with rope in the shape of a mouse! Village

boys cheered as I arrived on my Norton. Quickly up the wooden steps to the Dance Room I ran: it was an interval between dances: uttering a great screech, I announced myself as a Barn Owl. My joke or fancy at the Fancy Dress Dance fell flat and lifeless as a slab of wet putty. An old lady with white hair and a baby's complexion said, in my hearing, *Why was that drunken outsider invited, I wonder?* The room revolved about me: I felt the shock right through me. Desperately I thought of the Spartan boy and the fox, and stood in mock ease and interest by the doorway. I heard one of my new acquaintances saying to a friend a few minutes later, *My dear, he's quite harmless, only a little queer, from the War. At least an original costume, don't you think? Pyjamas are hardly original, surely? Well, it's all fun. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Williamson! So you're an owl, are you? Well, you are certainly original!* To someone else I heard the remark, *My dear, it's a success, don't you think—I've got three peeresses here!* I was introduced to a pretty girl, to whom I confided my fears of being ridiculous. She said, *Oh, I shouldn't let it worry me.* I dared to ask her to dance; my instinct was to flee, flee, for God's sake get out, Harry, old boy, laugh and the world laughs with you. I put a fixed grin on my face. Two pairs of lorgnettes were raised as we passed. One was from the white-haired pink-faced woman who had recognised a drunken outsider. It was she, I had learned, who had written the warning letter. Another fear struck me: supposing there was a hole in the seat of my pyjamas! As soon as I could I slipped away, ashamed of the flannel pyjamas tucked into my riding boots, and of my entire display. Dropping the baby's cap in the stream, I leapt on my Norton, and went away up the valley, throttle wide open, cursing myself for an utter idiot and complete bloody fool. Never again, never again, never again! In future I would be entirely solitary.

The dust of the lanes was on my shoes and trousers, the salt of the sea was in my hair, which in this twenty-sixth year of life was, as Annabelle had declared, beginning to grow grey. It was midsummer, with the voice of the corncrake in the moonlit corn, and swifts flying all night far up in the pale sky, and myself wandering in fields of dim-seen grazing sheep and cattle. It was high summer, and the sun in the sands by the sea recharged me for the night-dreaming of Annabelle. One morning there was relief in forgetfulness—for the postman brought the

proofs of Book Two. I did not bother about any food that day. Surely the print stood out of the paper! Most other books were flat print, worn-out ideas, worn-out details, nothing discovered by their authors. Surely Sophy and Spica, who had disliked the book, would feel otherwise when they read it again in print?

The truth is there was little in the book of my true mind, for at that time I was not sure of myself; and I could not distinguish between what was in my mind and what was on the printed page.

As the weeks went on, I became excited and apprehensive, for at the end of July Sophy, Annabelle, and Queenie, and a young cousin would be coming to the furnished house they had taken at the Bay. Two days before their arrival I decided definitely not to go to meet them; on the day before, I decided definitely to go; on the day, I decided to hire a taxi-cab and have it waiting for them, wearing my new suit of Donegal tweed with green silk shirt and tie, bronzed of face and with an easy smile, yet always keeping my distance. I rehearsed my greeting in the cool kitchen of the cottage. *How nice to see you all again! Hullo, Annabelle, how well you look! And Queenie, cool as a little flower of speedwell, and Sophy! Welcome to the West Country, welcome to Devon, the land of Cream and Cider. Welcome!* Annabelle would, of course, say, *Shurr-up!* I would take her and shake her, then coolly kiss her before all the others.

So much for my good intentions. The night before the arrival I did not sleep, and in the morning my face in the mirror looked awful. By midday the usual bully beef and raw onions were lumpy within me, and by 3 p.m. I decided not to go to the station. Oh damn! why had they come! In the Higher House that night I met Porky and with him I drank a quiet couple of pints of beer, staying there until closing time, when the suspense and self-destruction of desire and hope were nearly overwhelming. Should I jump on the Norton and go down to the Bay? No! Yes. No. Yes! Porky, calling his "little gels"—his pack of mongrel dogs—invited me to have supper in his cottage, and I gladly and reluctantly accepted, walking down the lane with him, to leave after midnight, and to stay for nearly an hour outside the moon-reflecting windows of Annabelle's new home, in the pale summer night. I would live only for my work. I would never see

them again. The walk home was light as a moth's flight. But alas, the heaviness was on my heart, or in my diaphragm, on awakening in the morning.

While I was washing up after breakfast, most surprisingly the shoulders and bare head of Annabelle went by above the garden wall. Joy leapt in me like a fountain turned on. She rode a bicycle; she was looking straight ahead.

"Annabelle!" How fresh her cheeks, how bright her eyes. She had come to see me! She gave a quick glance, and waved. "Come here, Annabelle!"

"What do you want?"

"I've something to show you!" Gladly, and as though reluctantly, Annabelle slowly rode on her bicycle to my cottage door, followed by a small boy. Annabelle did not dismount, but sat there, maintaining balance by holding to the stone wall. Her colour was lovely and vivid, she was smiling; yet her eyes were cool and steady upon me. Ignoring the shy small boy, who politely remained outside since I had forgotten to invite him into the cottage, I lured Annabelle up my staircase, on the pretence of seeing a horse-skin recently acquired. We sat on the edge of the bed.

"Oh, Annabelle, you didn't write to me."

"You didn't write to me."

"Annabelle, dear, I am so fond of you."

I put my arm around her, and laid my cheek on hers. She brimmed with pulsing warmth. Her dark eyes in the shadowed cottage room had the full deep colour of wallflowers. "I must go!"

"No, Annabelle, no!"

"I must, quick, let me go!"

"No, not yet, Annabelle! You haven't seen the horse-skin yet."

"Yes, I have. Is that the Hairy you rode in Essex? What did you do with the rest of it?"

"I ate it. Sit still, Annabelle."

"Shan't!"

"You shall!"

"Shan't! Really, I must go."

"But why?"

"You look too like an owl."

"But consider that horse-skin! Isn't it lovely?"

"It looks scruffy to me. Where did you get it, truly?"

"An old and faithful tenant of a small farm of an old lady near here was asked to bury her old and faithful pony, as it had laminitis badly, and to put a carved stone on its grave. Touching his hat, and pocketing the contract price, the old and faithful tenant farmer said, Yes m'am. He dug a hole, filled it in again, fixed the stone nicely, skinned the pony, sold me its skin secretly for ten bob, and its carcass to the kennelman of the Cheriton Otter Hounds, for a pound. Doesn't it look nice? Posterity will reverence it as my old war charger."

Annabelle would not let me kiss her, and so, determined to show how little I cared, I led the way downstairs. Sunlight renewed hope. "You haven't seen the kittens! Come on."

"But they're not upstairs—they're over there in the corner."

"Ah, but they live upstairs. The air is too cold for them downstairs. Help me take them up. Annabelle! Come here, Annabelle! Annabelle!"

Annabelle returned, followed by the shy little boy. "This is my cousin Marcus."

"How do you do, sir."

"Don't call me sir."

Marcus, who had carrotty hair and freckles, smiled noncommittally. "I—I did like 'The Beautiful Years', sir. Were you Mad Willie?"

"Of course he is Mad Willie," said Annabelle. "He weeps at the slightest thing. 'Ware Willie, Marcus, or he'll be spouting poetry at you."

"I like some poetry," confessed Marcus. "Especially John Masefield's."

"Don't start him off!" cried Annabelle. "Come on, we must go."

"Hear my gramophone, won't you, Annabelle?"

"No fear." Annabelle got astride her boy's bicycle, smiling at me. Her knee in the black school stocking was smooth and adorable. She remained, balancing in the doorway. "You old owl!"

The curve of Annabelle's knee was beautiful. I wanted to touch it, warmed by the sun. I had read of the knee being beautiful in one of Jefferies' essays, but had not known the feel-

ing until suddenly now. I grabbed two kittens. Pie fluffed her tail against my legs. The spaniel walked in, tail-stump alert, sniffing the visitors.

"Is that rag-bag yours?" asked Annabelle.

"Rag-bag? It's a prize spaniel."

"All of it?"

"Certainly."

"The horse-skin was the prize, I expect. Was this thing thrown in with it?" She pretended to kick Billjohn with her gym-shoe.

"No, it hatched out of the skin the other day." Marcus thought this very funny. Annabelle also laughed, showing lovely teeth and tip of pink tongue. Her beauty hurt. I felt subdued.

"We must go, come on, Marcus." She moved a yard only; her shadow was thrown sharply across the threshold. I wanted to outline it in pencil, but forebore. "Well, come on, Marcus. Leave the old owl to his own blinking devices. He is an owl—look at his eyes!" she taunted me.

"Billjohn is the godfather of these kittens, Marcus."

"Really, sir. Oh, I beg your pardon." He had touched me as he stooped to pat the dog.

"Don't beg an owl's pardon, Marcus. Are you coming? I'm off." And pushing away from the wall, Annabelle went.

"It's a pretty cat, Mr. Williamson. Aren't the kittens nicely coloured?"

"Yes. Her first lot. She was very scared when they were born, coming to tell me about it, meowing, her eyes large and dark as she came to me for comfort. She had them in the spaniel's basket, much to his disapproval. Pie loves Bill."

"I like him, si—er——"

"Call me Willie. They all do. I like it."

"Is he gun-trained?" asked Marcus hurriedly.

"Sort of. We go rabbiting sometimes. Daylight poaching, or theft, in fact. That's my Norton." Marcus approved its make and rakish appearance. I told him it could do seventy. Annabelle's shadow reappeared.

"Still jawing? Oh, I forgot to ask you. Mother says, would you care to come to lunch. And we have a tennis court, apparently. You do play, don't you?"

To avoid revealing the fatal, heavy feeling within, I tried to be funny. "Do I *not* play? My cannon ball service is terrific—

fifty per cent of the balls burst into flame." Annabelle laughed, balancing on the bicycle. "You priceless ninny!"

"Are you seventeen yet, Annabelle?"

"Her birthday's next wee——" began Marcus, but "Don't tell him!" she cried, adding, "I don't want any books of poetry! Anyhow, it's a long way off."

"I'll give you my Norton."

"Is it dud?"

"Dud? It's a Brookland Road Special Model! I'll give you a lift; wait!" I wheeled it out. My bleached bathing dress was tied round the handlebars.

"Willie will now swank," remarked Annabelle.

"Why *now*?" asked a cool and demure voice. "Why not, 'Willie will swank', or better still, just 'Willie'?"

"Hullo, Queenie." Queenie was neat and flower-like in her dark grey riding kit. "Aye, Queenie is on an old familiar local object of motion. You should see its action when drawing a load of stones. I once rode behind it all the way to the Bay in the moonlight, Porky driving. Have you met Porky yet? The answer's a lemon."

"What *is* he saying?" demanded Queenie, in a bored voice, as she smiled sweetly at me.

I began to feel ill-at-ease, in her presence. If Annabelle was blunting, Queenie seemed to cut aslant one's directness to life. Queenie dismounted. Her eyes looked wide and innocent as she held out a small hand to be shaken.

"Ask him to show you his skin, Queenie."

"His skin?" said Queenie, demurely. "Why, has he got some awful disease?"

"I say, it can do seventy!" said Marcus. "It's a Brooklands Road Special!"

"What, your skin?" asked Queenie. "How very amusing. Do show me."

"It's a horse-skin. It's upstairs. Do you mind?"

"Why should I mind? If Annabelle's seen a horse-skin that can do seventy, why shouldn't I see one? Seventy what, by the way?"

We went up the stairs. "How thrilling to think this is where you write your books!" Queenie's voice became whisperingly intimate on the landing. "One day this cottage will be famous. Then I shall tell my friends I once went into Aitch Williamson's

bedroom. My dear, how exciting. Is that the horse-skin? Where did you get it?" I told her, but she appeared not to be listening. "Aren't you terribly uncomfortable in here? I should loathe it."

"One hears the owls overhead."

"Oh yes, I forgot, you love owls, don't you?"

There seemed nothing else to say. We went down the stairs again. "Would you like a kitten, Queenie. They're almost ripe?"

"Ripe? What a quaint expression. No, I don't want a kitten. Why should I want a kitten? What queer ideas you get."

"Who's giving away kittens? Oh, the darlings. Is this Pie? She's sweet. Hullo, Willie!" Sophy stood on the threshold. Her voice was slightly quivering, colour was in her cheeks. I noticed again how gentle and slender was her hand, which remained in mine. Was she feeling as I had felt when Annabelle had first appeared? I would not blunt Sophy, anyway. "We've been looking at Willie's horse-skin, Mother. I say, is my hair too frightful? I can't find a mirror anywhere," said Queenie. Annabelle's shapely legs were turning the pedals backwards, as she strove for balance on the bicycle. She seemed intent, striving to keep upright. "What an abode of tranquillity," said Sophy, and looking at me. "Well, and how are you, Willie?"

"Oh, top-hole. Did you have a good journey?"

"Yes, thank you. It's the most gorgeous country. No wonder you can write here." She dipped a fingertip in the bowl of washing-up water, which was tepid. She glanced around. "I'm looking for matches. Let me wash up for you."

"No, really, thanks, Sophy. I'll do it later."

"But I'd like to. Is this the kettle? You've got a Beatrice stove, I see. Is this the water? And look at the child's socks!" She looked at my feet. "My dear, you need looking after, I can see that. If you like, I'll do any darning you require. I've got a basket here, and can take some back with me now. Are you coming to lunch?"

"Thanks, I'd like to."

"Good. I'll just light the lamp." The bicycle fell. "Annabelle, dear, mind you don't hurt yourself. And mind the handlebars on Willie's door—did you paint the owl, Willie? It's like an Indian totem. You child of nature!"

I knew only that Annabelle was gone: I saw her cycling past the door of the old cottager called Uncle Joe.

"See you later," called the voice of Queenie. "Don't stay too long in Willie's bedroom, Mother. Remember you're at the dangerous age."

"Silly child," murmured Sophy. "Well, Willie, I hope the triple intrusion won't interfere with your work. What's the book you're on now? Oh yes, you told me about that. It should be good. Been doing any more nature stories? That's your real line, you know."

In the corner of my eye I saw Annabelle and the boy pedalling furiously round the bend of the lane, apparently having a race. Annabelle's plait was swinging and flying. A black butterfly of hair-ribbon fluttered down.

"Excuse me a moment, Sophy." I ran back, the frayed black bow in my pocket. "I thought I saw a rare butterfly."

"What was it?"

"It looked like a bit of black paper, out of Uncle Joe's chimney."

"You shouldn't say 'Excuse me'," remarked Sophy, turning down the stove wick. "A very genteel expression, don't you think?"

"Sorry. What should I have said?"

"'Will you forgive me a moment', or just, 'I'll be back in a moment'. And you needn't say 'Sorry' to me, ever. I only want to help you, you see, my dear. Now while I'm washing up, you turn out any socks that need mending, and be a good little boy."

20

It was summer, and the sands were ruffled with footsteps and strewn with drying towels, bathing dresses, and a fitted tea-basket stood where once my small driftwood fire had burned, heating spring-water in the black kettle hidden in the tall reeds growing above the big, wave-smoothed grey and blue boulders. Others besides ourselves were coming to the shore, some on ponies from the far end of the bay. Motorcars tried to get to the sands, but though they came down the lane on their own power, some went up behind horses. A gramophone played among the rocks. My hair was cut and brushed. I had joined a

tennis club at Combe, and played there with Sophy, Annabelle and Queenie, riding there and back in the not-so-new 1921 Ford car, a scarf round my neck and my white shoes correctly pipe-clayed. But the waves were the same, with sometimes a sea-trout or a bass leaping in the long green rollers.

Annabelle, the hobbledehoy schoolgirl, was transformed in her bright red bathing dress. Her dark hair was twisted up and tucked into a red cap, and where then was the captain of the hockey team? Annabelle, I told myself in my diary at night, was formed in an exquisite mould—nothing was noticeable. She was like a work of art whose artistry was entirely hidden. One did not think, What lovely curves, or, What fine texture of skin. One simply took a swift glance, and felt despair, that her beauty was beyond one. Whence came that beauty, I asked the pages rapidly filled with writing. I had to answer for the Diary, declaring that Annabelle was not responsible for her beauty; she merely wore it as a flower wore its petals, or a bird sang its song. Why, when I was near Annabelle, did I think of the War? Why as I walked on the sunlit sands did my mind drag me backwards into time, to hear the nightingales singing in the woods of Aveluy, that sinister place lit by the gun-flashes in the Ancre valley? And after walking alone in the fields at night, or sleeping on the haystack under the tallat with the spaniel (Pie followed us there once or twice), why was Annabelle identified with the song of the nightingale heard in the woods of boyhood. Peace, rest, beauty—the nightingale's song; Annabelle, the spirit of beauty in the shape of her body, in the brightness of her eyes, in the strength and whiteness of her teeth and in her sun-sweet smile. Peace, rest, beauty—the goal of my life: Annabelle, O Annabelle, come to me and let me lose myself in thee!

Sometimes in the evening Sophy played the piano, while Annabelle and I sang, often together in duet. I had bought an old song by Gounod, called *O that we two were Maying!* which I used to play on my Decca trench-gramophone during the War. Annabelle sang with a childish simplicity, every note went through my breast. For fear of loss, for fear of what Sophy would say if she knew I loved her child, I concealed my feeling; while, with my sung notes, I was seeking the heart of Annabelle.

When I glanced at her, I tried to keep the feeling from my

eyes. I was afraid, I was terrified lest she discover how I felt, and laugh at me, so that I would have to go away. Did I see a dark and mystic look on her face, as her cheeks burned in the light of the oil lamp? Sophy never appeared to see it; but I knew that Sophy knew. I tried to tell Annabelle of my love as I sang with her. Once, in the faraway Folkestone days, I had fancied myself as a silver or lyric tenor; but after having had a gramophone record made of my voice at the Fair, and hearing the sound playing back at me, I had realised it was too soft and blurry. How awful, to sing like that! Worse than a ninny, indeed. Yet sometimes my voice was clear, and I felt I was moving Annabelle in my songs, Roger Quilter's *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal*, and one from *The Shropshire Lad*, called *Loveliest of Trees*.

On the haystack there was peace, while the night wind in the rafters of the tallat made a wild music, and the dry grasses each made a whisper. I spread my arms on the hay, and buried my fingers among the hard stalks and the thistles. My head lay to the west, so that I could see the eastern sky, and the moon which after midnight would arise like a gold moth from the dark earth's cocoon. The stars were mine: Burning Swan and Lyra, the Virgin and Antares, Mars and the Northern Crown. Misery left me, and I was tranquil. Thus I lay, between sleeping and waking, the long and windy night, in a land of dream where there was no injustice, no wrong, no un-understanding, no crown of thorns, or ember-burn of love.

The summer days shone into harvest, the wayside flowers drooped, dust covered the grasses, the birds no longer sang, the corn was cut, the horseflies disappeared from the sunken lane, the spring-tide came up to the reeds by the grey and blue boulders and then the neap tide let the sands dry again, the hot sands loose under my feet as I walked by myself to hear the strange music in the sky, rising and falling with the sun in the sands.

Three people rode in the hired Ford car, sitting on the seat in the back. Mother on the left, daughter on the right, I in the middle. We were returning from the Tennis Tournament. Annabelle had been my partner in the Mixed Doubles. After some hard games we had got into the semi-finals. During the afternoon we had seldom spoken; Annabelle appeared to ignore me. I thought, She is young, she is certain of my affection, and

therefore she does not care very much; or perhaps it is her inability to feel love for me. We had lost the semi-finals. Annabelle usually played well, but in her women's singles she had played badly, and when she came off the court, looking tired, I had said to her, with self-torture, "You are an idiot to lose, Annabelle," and she had passed to the dressing room without a word. Tea afterwards was silent.

We drove back in a drizzle of mist, seeing the grey Atlantic in patches from the high ground. Grey clouds passed overhead. The weather had broken. We were wrapped in thick rugs. Under the rug I sought Annabelle's hand and held it. She clasped my hand firmly. I felt like singing for joy; Annabelle returned my feeling. She is telling me she loves me, I thought. I assumed an expressionless face, and looked away over the ocean, feeling a hypocrite, yet feeding a little while on hope and love. Sophy appeared to glance several times at the concealing rug, during the journey. Her face had lost its usual animation. She looked tired and worn. I said to her, "Your hands are cold; let me hold them, Sophy." She shook her head, without a glance or a smile, and looked sadly away. Sophy knew I was holding the hand of Annabelle, I thought; she cannot speak, she cannot force herself to say anything, she is cut to the heart with misery. What was to be the end of it? I felt if it went on like that much longer I should not be able to stand it. But what could I do?

Pickles' words came back to me, as they did so many times a day:—*She will convince herself, and honestly believe, that it will be best for Annabelle's happiness that you be absolutely and unmistakably discouraged. A woman's sympathy to a man is given only because of a personal interest in and for a man on account of herself; and as soon as that interest goes, finding no natural response, a woman's sympathy will naturally cease. She will even hate herself for her own behaviour, and dislike the man the more for being the cause of her feeling ashamed.*

I withdrew my hand from Annabelle's, under the rug, and sat with folded arms, looking neither to right nor to left.

"We're all very tired," said Sophy, when at last we got out at "Belle View", her hired furnished house. "I wonder if that boy remembered to pump up the water. No, the wretch hasn't. You ought to have a hot bath, Annabelle dear, and then go straight to bed. The wretched youth has taken most of the cigarettes, too." She looked in the silver box on the table.

"I'll pump up the water," I said. "This rain will fill the rain-water tanks."

I lit the fire in the furnace, and then I pumped for half an hour, with the semi-rotary pump. While I pumped, I determined to avoid both Annabelle and her mother in future. Gradually I would fade myself away. To be an artist, that was my life! I pumped steadily though my arm ached.

The water took too long to get hot, and so the bath was postponed until after supper. Sophy got the meal, while Annabelle lay down on the sofa, under a rug. Queenie was away at Pompey seeing the young sailor to whom she was engaged.

After supper, Annabelle, who usually would not go to bed when told, filled her hot-water jug from the kettle on the kitchen hob, and with burning cheeks and dark eyes glanced quickly at me. At once my resolution weakened. Did she love without knowing it, did she mean to tell me that she loved, and would be patient, and would wait for me; or was it only my silly self seeing my own abstractions in her lovely eyes? I waited, the interior ache recrudescent.

Annabelle went to her mother, and kissed her goodnight.

"Goodnight, darling," said Sophy. "You're a good, sweet girl."

My heart jolted. Had some decision been taken about me already? I waited for more; but Annabelle, with a murmured goodnight to me, went to bed. Sophy and I sat by the fire. A few minutes later Sophy filled her own jug, said, "Well, I must go to bed. Stop here if you want to—it's warmer than your cottage, isn't it, old man?"

It seemed strange to be called old man by Sophy.

"I think I'll go now. I'm rather tired."

"Yes, it will do you good to get some sleep. Goodnight."

Sophy was gone; for the first time in many weeks she had deliberately and obviously turned away without even a hand-clasp. Of course! They had both agreed to fade themselves out! I tried to control the feeling of darkness in which I seemed to be spinning away.

With a heavy feeling near to desperation, I went home in the rain on the Norton. On arrival my white flannels were clotted with red mud from the lane. I undressed, flinging my clothes on the floor. Lying in bed, I recalled with a groan what Sophy

had said at tea. What was it she had said? Now I must recall the exact words, the tone of voice, the look in her face: now then, Teatime, Annabelle on my left, Sophy pouring tea on my right. Three tables away, Captain Garfield, an acquaintance of Landguard Fort, Felixstowe, Indian Army, dark, stern-looking, a real he-man. Playing in the semi-finals with steel-wire raquet: terrific smash. Sophy saying, *Oh, Willie, do you know him? I saw you speaking to him. You knew him in the War. Then you don't know if he is married or not? No, I don't think so,* I said, to say something. Then Sophy had said, *Feel better, Annabelle? There's a chance for you after all, then.* Did Sophy watch my face as she spoke those words? Her mouth was slightly open, as though she was a little breathless. I knew that attitude, she was like it when she was tender about a new hatched duckling cupped in her hands, or bending down by a small child playing in a puddle alone on the sands. A woman at the next table, a Club acquaintance, had said, *They say that he's engaged to the Wannop girl, who partners him in the mixed doubles. Oh, the one with the thick ankles. Poor old Annabelle, never mind dear. A broken heart's soon mended. Besides, one never really loves at your age—it's all imagination!*

Ah, that was the key to it! To warn me! *One never really loves at your age, it's all imagination!*

There was no hope at all in the morning, the rain falling heavily outside. *It was all imagination;* yes, that was my life. Only that. I was useless and bewildered in the normal world; I could not compete on its terms. Ah, that was the cause of my failure, again and again! I was all imagination! A dreadful fate was upon me; I was abnormal; I was a freak of nature, as Julian had said, as Mrs. Dawson-Scott had inferred—always a misfit in the ordinary world. That was the true world, the ordinary world; mine was the untrue world! It had been so all along; at home; at school; and the War was the apotheosis of—how could one man fight so much, so many. O God, why had I taken on the terrible tyranny of a fixed idea? *It's all imagination!* a will o' the wisp: *ignis fatuus*, marsh gas, exhalation of a swamp, of rot and decay. I saw it all, and had to smother a cry that seemed to come from my broken-apart life. Madness was complete "all imagination"! Of course, all my talk and feeling would repel a natural female woman. When I was silent and unimaginative, Annabelle was attracted to me. I saw it all, with paradise-

clearness, with the light of the Morning Star, who was Lucifer, the Lightbringer, the Prince of Darkness, the aspiring Soul of Man! Save me, save me, I cried under my blanket, while I shivered in deep fear. Let me be normal, let me feel like ordinary people, let me forget the War, let me be ordinary, before it is too late!

Later, when I was calmer, I thought, Poetry is cold, like high altitudes; physical love is warm, and of the lower places, literally so. I had no hope of physical or natural love; no hope with Annabelle. When I spoke my mind, I was just a fool, a fool of eternity. I did not know what to do. The rain fell steadily.

21

About nine o'clock the weather cleared and the sun shone, and with renewed hope I went with my spaniel, as usual, to "Belle View". The boy Marcus was there, and I suggested a picnic on the Burrows. To my surprise Annabelle said at once, "I'll ask Mother!" I was delighted. The Burrows, a tract of sand dunes and mossy pans behind a shallow coast, where many wild flowers grew, was the most beautiful place I knew, because the loneliest. To my surprise, Sophy made no objection. Annabelle, Marcus and I caught the 'bus from the Bay. We got out at the hotel on the cliffs, and went down the path to the shore.

As we walked south, more rain gathered over the distant estuary in drifting clouds, and by the wreck of a wooden ship buried in the wide sands, it began to fall and hide the horizons around us. We plodded on, with the idea of crossing the estuary in a salmon boat to the fishing village. After a couple of hours we reached a sandy tongue, and were rowed across the leaping waters, to land on the stone slip and run barefoot on the quay, and into one of the many inns of the village. While the landlord made a fire in the sitting room, Annabelle went upstairs to have a hot bath. Marcus and I sat before the fire. I had given both of them some hot rum with lemon and sugar to drink on arrival, lest they catch cold; and had had a double rum for myself. When Annabelle came down, Marcus went up to the bathroom. Annabelle looked radiant; her eyes were bright, and her hair was loose. She brushed it, tossing back the long dark tresses. I

took the brush from her hand and sat her on my lap, my arms around her. She kept kissing my cheek, and clasping me to her breast. It was like a dream I said nothing, for I knew that words were my enemy, or thoughts that tried to be uttered as words. I kissed Annabelle on the cheek, and hugged her, and wondered if I were unmanly, for did not manly men kiss a girl full on the mouth; was not that the way to win a woman? I felt also behind my joy the burden of my deadly seriousness. So I said nothing, but stroked her hair and held her in my arms, loving her silently, and when Marcus came down I ordered boiled eggs and tea and bread and butter. We ate these with gusto. Afterwards we sat before the fire, while the rain streamed down the window pane. It looked as though it were set in for the rest of the day, and thinking that Sophy might be anxious, I put on my shoes, which were warm though still sodden, and went outside to find a car to take us the twenty miles by road back to the Bay. Snuggled up together in the car, we got back without mishap.

Queenie was there when we arrived, with tales of Pompey, the dances, the lights on the ships, the Admiral's barge, and the cattiness of some of the young wives. Queenie had had a ripping time, she said, and had a man in tow, called Torps, who was coming to visit them. "You'll like Torps, Annabelle," said Queenie.

I helped to wash up the supper dishes, before the evening music and songs at the piano. During the time by the sink and draining board, Sophy's interior made a slight rumbling once or twice, an effect I had often experienced from bully beef in the old days of solitary eating in my cottage. Queenie, as she dried up beside me, said, "You're getting old, Mother," with a slight laugh.

"Nonsense," I said, "it is a sign of extreme youth. Why, when you were in swaddling clothes, you were like a little cave when the tide rises, on a breezy day, all pobbly and gurgling. Furthermore, you were often sick. Anyway, it was me rumbling, Queenie. I have a dog inside me, who warns me when an evil spirit is about."

"You *are* a ninny," remarked Queenie, with a soft uplong look of silky eyelashes. Sophy continued to wash the spoons and forks meticulously.

Afterwards, the piano, and the songs; while Queenie knitted a yellow pullover for—but she would not say. Queenie had been knitting a yellow pullover for the General whom she now called “dear old Bay”; but Sophy had finished it, I understood. Sometimes in light conversation—all the conversation at “Belle View” was light, for of course it was not good form to be serious except in private—Sophy and Queenie revealed by their use of sporting terms how they regarded men. Thus Queenie, on the first occasion, at Tollemere Park, that she had worn a diamond ring for her engagement to a young and amiable sailor called Boy, had, before the official announcement in *The Morning Post*, spoken demurely of “using the gaff”. The gaff, I understood, was a sharp steel hook by which a salmon, after being played to exhaustion, was lifted out of the river or loch. “He’s well hooked”, or “His tongue hanging out”, “He’s gone to earth”, and “He rose to the lure”, were other phrases to describe aspects of the amatory sport, spoken in amiable banter. It was the deliberateness of love’s aspect that stilled me within; although I felt that my attitude was due to a defect within myself. The difference was, perhaps, in that they were a happy family and the more natural; while I had been one of an unhappy family, and was therefore the more unnatural. Yes, I thought to myself: these people are natural while I am unnatural, in part mortified. The mortified part of me was the pretentious poet or artist.

Queenie and Annabelle had gone to bed, each hugging a hot-water bottle. I sat in the kitchen with Sophy, before a declining fire. I read in *The Morning Post* of the death of Lord Northcliffe, and mourned the passing of a great man, with whom I had talked, admiring his courtesy and directness, only a year and a half before, while working for *The Times*. It was sad to think of that enthusiasm and vitality being strangled and distorted by insanity, finally to be darkened out.

“Aren’t you cold all that way from the fire, child?”

Pretending to read the paper, I said that I was quite warm. “The walk was really hot, thank you.”

“But you came home by car.”

Wheedling and patient, as to a hound puppy being walked, Sophy repeated, “Won’t you come and sit near me?”

“Would you care to see *The Morning Post*?” I brought it to her.

“Poof, who cares for *The Morning Post*?”

"All the right people do, don't they?"

Sophy threw it down. "Come and talk to me, and don't be tiresome."

Our chairs approached about eighteen inches nearer. Sophy complained that they were still too far apart for conversation. I drew mine six inches nearer. We sat staring into the fire, I into the eyes of Annabelle staring at me from the glowing bars. Drowsily Sophy's voice asked me to be nice to her. I did not know what to say.

"What's troubling you, child?"

"Nothing."

"But there must be something. You are always so *distract*."

"Nothing, really."

"Is it anything I have done?"

"No, you are always most kind to me."

"But you don't like me."

"Yes, I do."

"Put your arms round me, child."

I put my arm on Sophy's shoulder. I told myself I must be "master of the situation", and thus prevent Sophy injuring herself. Also, to prevent injury to myself. *O Annabelle, I see thee in the fire, I strain to thee in my mind, I will not be turned aside, I will guard my love for thee, Annabelle.* All the while Sophy's lips were fondling my cheek. I did not know what to do.

"There is something on your mind, obviously. Won't you tell me?"

"Oh, I know you'll—I'm going to tell you something—oh, I'm not going to scorn the truth—look, I'm very sorry——"

"You talk just like that funny creature in your novels, child."

"I am just a book, woman."

"Oh no, you're not, you're much nicer than your old novels. There, I've hurt your feelings, haven't I? 'The Policy of Reconstruction'! What do *you* know of the world, my young friend?"

"Ah!" I said.

"Come on, wise child, throw your pearls of wisdom before me."

"'Ties which one day must be broken, should never be made'."

"Dear dear, that sounds rather like something out of your book. It is like saying, bootlaces which have to be untied should never be tied, or necks that are bound to get grubby should never be washed."

"Is my neck grubby?"

"No, don't be alarmed! You are a clean little animal; only your shoes should be brushed occasionally."

"Haven't got any brushes."

"Then buy some."

"What, out of my beer money? But seriously, by my remark, I mean that, on moral or ethical grounds, such ties that inevitably will involve human suffering and remorse, should not be made."

"Remorse? Remorse? By whom?"

Sophy threw her cigarette into the fire. "Don't talk so, child. Rest that poor brain of yours."

"Sophy, if only I could make myself clear."

"Yes, it would certainly help to sell your books. There now, I'm only ragging!"

"In Essex you reproached me for not wanting to go to church. I told you I believed in the Christ-spirit, the Kristos, but not in its ostentated form."

"But whatever has that to do with you and me?"

"I don't know how to continue."

"Of course you don't! So why try?"

"One day—oh, I don't know how to go on. I cannot deviate from the pathway I was meant to tread—oh, please believe me—I—really."

The Pathway! That was the title I was trying to find, for the final volume after *The Dream of Fair Women! I am the way, the truth, and the life*—the most beautiful line in all literature!

"Words, words, words! Don't you like me—just a little bit?"

A meteor slid through the sky, now clear of clouds, as I went back to my cottage. It was like a gold falcon. The gold falcon of honour, of integrity, of pride, soared invisibly down the track-ways of the stars—the stars themselves streaming ceaseless and vain through the light-years.

I thought of Sophy. Sophy was Annabelle a little younger in Time. Sophy was lonely, very lonely since her husband had gone down at the battle of Jutland. Sophy's feeling was natural feeling; it was part of life; it was the prompting of the life-force, of nature, of the solar god.

I entered the cottage, lit a candle, rubbed down the spaniel on a sack, gave Pie some milk in a saucer, washed and cleaned

my teeth, and wrote in my journal for about an hour. Then upstairs to bed, the two animals following me and keeping me company through another night.

On the last day of her holidays I gave Annabelle my journal to read. One way or another, that would decide my fate. Annabelle sat on the concrete steps of "Belle View" for half an hour with the book. Now she would know what I felt about her, and why I was what she called morbid. Annabelle read to the last entry, closed the book, handed it back to me, and remarked, "Most amusing."

The following day I made an excuse to go to London by train. Annabelle was going back to school on that train. I took her as far as Victoria, where another girl, who had left school at the end of the summer term, her friend, met her. Annabelle was games-captain of her house, and had rosettes to give to members of her hockey team—colours, I supposed. There was one spare rosette.

"What shall I do with it?" said Annabelle, during tea in the refreshment room. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shone in a way that devastated me. I had tried to kiss her in the railway carriage—she had leapt up, and sat on another seat. Thereupon I had sat almost unspeaking during the rest of the journey. I behaved like Sophy, in fact: except that Sophy didn't seem to show obviously any fears of being unwanted, as I did. Now I hoped that Annabelle would give me the rosette; foolish thought, I knew, and out of proportion; but I hoped she would, secretly, as the train moved out. She didn't. London was lonely afterwards, with nowhere to go, and no friends to see.

When I got back to Devon, Sophy and Queenie were packing, before leaving for their Essex home, looking forward to the hunting season, the badminton, the dances, the plays in London. After they had gone away I felt lonely, and walked to the sands by myself, among the old footmarks where we had played and walked. When I returned, there were letters lying on the table, with some press clippings. *Dandelion Days* had been published. I read first a letter from Annabelle, opening the envelope with bumping heart. It was short, half a page only, and it said, *You don't seem able to hit off a happy medium, and so I am going to cry off for a bit.* I saw Sophy's hand in that! I was done for! *Julian, Julian, you would understand, where are you, Julian?*

A couple of hours later I felt calmer. I read the press clippings. *The Times Literary Supplement* said, "The author pictures for us with meticulous precision every individual in an unprepossessing mob of boys and masters, and diffusely chronicles Willie's schooldays—a sordid round of class-room 'rags', fights, shirkings, subterfuges, and corporal punishments."

Miss Sarah Gertrude Millin in *The Cape Times* said, "Mr. Williamson is not discovered as a Keats."

The Pioneer of Allahabad said, "Willie never saves the day at cricket or football. Like his auther, he is entirely devoid of humour."

That evening I went down to see Porky, and gave him a copy of the book, one of six which had been sent by the publishers. I had a happy evening in his cottage by the sea; there was no nicer companion than Porky when he sat quietly at home.

22

A week later, after some aimlessness, I told myself that what I required was a life of strict discipline. I would rise in the morning at the same hour, work to certain times, walk ten miles daily, and go to bed promptly every night at ten o'clock. Soon I was feeling happier about life.

I went to see my acquaintances at the Bay, who asked why I had not been to see them since the dance, when I had dressed up as an owl. They were most friendly, and took me in their car to the opening meet of a hunt beyond Bideford. One of the girls had a hunter awaiting her, and I found I could hire a horse for thirty shillings a day from a local stables. Why not? It was a friendly field, and I arranged to go to the next meet, which I did, leaving the Norton in the hedge by a thatched inn. It was wild country, so different from the Essex clays; there were no great hedges of thorn—the "bullfinches" or bull-fences—to "fly", but banks of stone and earth, often grown with furze or ash, for the horse to jump upon, change feet, and jump off. There were boggy patches where rushes grew and from which curlews flew up, crying. There were also many foxes in the numerous oak-woods, and it was seldom that we had a run of more than a few minutes in sequence. One day, however, three of the field had a grand run

almost to the borders of Cornwall, and by chance—having lost the rest—I was one of them. My presence was apparently noted at the kill; and I was congratulated: “Very sporting of you to have taken your own line like that, Pops.” I had acquired a nickname; I felt firmer, and clearer; and an invitation to a dance a day or two later made me feel that life was fine. I would not return to Essex, I determined, but remain in Devon, playing hard and working hard alternately. That was the life!

In the past I had tried several ways of getting myself out of bed alertly—disciplining myself to shave and wash before darting down the stairs to see what the postman had brought; telling myself it would be bad luck to be in bed after the final stroke of eight o’clock. Now I arose at 7 a.m. One of my exercises was “shadow-boxing”. While going through the motions, I noticed that when I worked my arms and shoulder blades, my breath came wheezy and harsh through my throat. Immediately it seemed that my bronchial tubes must be eaten away with consumption. That was the cause of my melancholy, my depression—tuberculosis! The thought touched me like an icicle.

A disabled infantry officer staying in the village had spent three months at a sanatorium, for a Tb throat. During the morning the conviction grew on me that that was my fate also. Misery more or less persistent since childhood, boyhood, and the war, I convinced myself, had now reduced me as their sorrows had reduced Jefferies, Thompson, Keats, Stevenson, Tchckov, and a score of others. Of course, all the symptoms were there, of phthisis! Like Jefferies, I must have a scrofulous diathesis,—I didn’t quite know what that was, but it was in keeping with rasping breath passing through decayed lungs when I worked my shoulder blades up and down.

After two days of dejection, I went to see Dr. O’Connor. He tapped my chest and took a test of my sputum. He said I was sound; but anyway, he would let me know the result. For a fortnight, I waited. No word came, and I fortified myself for the worst, writing a letter to Annabelle, to be posted after my death. I wrote also to my mother, leaving both letters in my chest of drawers. Then I began to write, all day and half the night, because I was afraid to die with my tetralogy unwritten.

I imagined the doctor did not like to tell me because he thought it might make me worse. One morning, however,

something occurred which made me seek the doctor. I called at the Lower House, the landlord of which I thought of as a callous, badger-digging ruffian, and he said to me, "There be a gennul-man looking for to see you. He have just come to the parish, and be a very nice man." It turned out to be the ex-officer who had spent three months in a sanatorium. The landlord's enthusiasm for one who spent several hours each day in the pub at once made me wish to avoid him; but when he came in a moment later, he seemed a reasonable fellow, and we had a drink together.

"The Doc.'s looking for you," he said. "He told me at golf the other day, 'I've got an unpleasant thing to tell Williamson'."

I felt myself going white. I sat down on a bench.

"Now what have you been doing, old man?" casually enquired the stranger. "Have a whiskey—I recommend it—you look a bit white about the gills old lad—landlord, a double whiskey for this gentleman!"

I thanked him, wished him good health, and swallowed it. Julian had been right: I was going to die. Well, I wouldn't be the first. It would mean going into a hospital, I supposed. Poor J. D. Beresford, he would be let down; for he had said it would take seven years for me to become a seller. Seven years—that would be 1928 from when *The Beautiful Years* was published—an unimaginable future. *Dandelion Days* had sold three hundred copies, *The Beautiful Years* five hundred, *The Lone Swallows* one hundred and forty copies. The twenty-five pounds advance for each book would not be earned. Now they would be forgotten.

"... yes, old boy," my new acquaintance was saying, "the Doc. says to me, 'Some of the lady members came to me and demanded a general meeting to expel young Williamson from the Club'."

What was he saying? Was I ill? I did not understand.

"I don't know any more, old boy, that's all the Doc. told me. I said I'd tell you when I ran across you. Don't let it get under your skin. Have another whiskey?"

I thanked him, no; offered him one; he had a beer; I excused myself; got on my Norton, and went at once to find the doctor.

As I waited among the panel patients, leaning against the flaky lime-washed wall, I felt once more the precision of the biblical expression of bowels turning to water. The patients were

all in drab clothes; they sat still, obedient and subdued as they had in the schoolroom. It was hard to believe that some must feel as I felt. Each one seemed afraid of his or her voice. Should I make a joke? I was afraid of my own voice.

At length the doctor saw me. "Hullo! Come on in!" he said cheerfully. The panel patients moved their congested toecaps an inch or so, making way for me. "Well, what can I do for you?"

The doctor was tanned of face, with a pleasing Irish voice. "I say, your *Lone Swallows* is delightful. I've just read it with my small son. He likes *Ernie* best. You're looking well."

He peered at me quizzically. I found it hard to say anything. My heart beat rapidly, and I was in a cold sweat.

"Have I got tuberculosis?" I managed to ask.

"It's most unlikely. You didn't have it a month or so ago. You needn't worry—you lead far too healthy a life. I'll give you a tonic."

"Then that sputum or specimen showed negative?"

"Yes. There was no tubercle present. Didn't I tell you? My dear fellow, I'm so sorry, but I thought I'd told you. You must have been worrying yourself."

"Yes, I remember you told me when I came before that it was most unlikely."

"You want to feed up, old chap. Living alone is not good for a man. What do you eat?"

"Oh, eggs, bacon, sardines, bully beef, bread and cheese."

"Be damned to that, my dear boy! Can't you get someone to give you meals? What about the old postman's wife? She used to be a good cook, so I've heard, when she was in service. They take in summer visitors, so why not winter guests? Try it; it's not good for you to be alone. Oh, I know what I wanted to talk to you about. It's about the tennis club. There are some conventional people here, as you know, and apparently your bohemian reputation has got about; all nonsense of course, but you know how people talk. Anyone a little out of the ordinary—"

"A Captain Ramm I met in the pub told me something about chucking me out."

"Oh, that silly business! What happened was this. When you went to Mrs. 'Roddy' Wrey's dance at Piddickswell, someone saw you there and said to someone else, 'Why was that man invited

here?" Mrs. 'Roddy' overheard, and said, 'Oh, we met him out with the hounds, and he seemed a pleasant young man.' But this someone else apparently got into a huddle with her informant, and the morning after came to me with another woman and said I ought not to have let you into the Club without a Committee meeting, owing to your being an immoral and altogether unsuitable person. I suppose I ought to have put you up to the Committee in the ordinary way, but it seemed rather unnecessary, as we had only about a dozen members anyway. Well, there you are, old chap. I managed to pacify them, saying I knew you were nothing of the kind, and stopped the general meeting they wanted to be called, and told them I'd see you about it quietly. A lot of damned rot, but there it is."

"But what have they got against me, Doctor?"

"Well, I'll be frank with you, several things," he smiled at me. "Someone with daughters said she had been told you had been a co-respondent in a divorce case. She said you got fighting drunk, shot off guns at people, and tried to murder a friend who once lived with you. Then you were supposed to be married and to have deserted your wife. And there was something about a woman with a young girl, living near you. She was mentioned as a respondent in a divorce case. You know how rumours get about."

"But it's not true," I protested. "Irene has not been divorced. And I've never hit any man, old or young, anywhere, except perhaps in the War, and certainly not in Devon. I did fire a gun off once, for a joke. As for being a drunkard, well, I've been tight in the past, but not for two years, at least."

"Well, there it is, I've told you all I know, old chap."

It so happened that a lady who had asked me to tea a week or two before the dance, after I had partnered her daughter at the tennis club, passed me outside the surgery. Did she avoid looking at my face, and had she really not observed my hesitation before raising my cap? I knew that a man should await to be greeted first in such circumstances; and immediately felt mortification that I had so foolishly exposed myself to a snub. In the town a few days later I met another woman, with whom I had played several times at the club: she too looked straight ahead, ignoring my salute. I found myself doing what hitherto I had derided as the *cliché* of a prehistoric novelist, clenching my fists until the fingernails dug into the palms of my hands. I

recalled with mortification that I had enthusiastically given her a copy of my book, with a long inscription on the half-title page, about the origin and purpose of the tetralogy. I had given it to her because she had said she enjoyed golf on the Burrows the more because every kind of wild flower was supposed to grow there. At the Club, a week or two later, she had said, *Whatever made you write such a book? As for the love-scene at the end . . . would any boy of sixteen or seventeen in love with a young girl behave like that? Surely you weren't serious when you wrote it?*

I arranged to have my meals in the cottage of the postman-sexton of the village. I went foxhunting no more. Instead I played rummy, for burnt matches, with a village acquaintance, an ex-officer named Valentine, who was married and had a small child. Valentine was trying to increase his pension by free-lance journalism. This young man, who periodically brewed beer in the baby's bath and bottled it in screw-top bottles which usually burst at midnight with the noise of exploding bombs, and I had the most exhausting arguments about Jesus, Socialism, and the Great War, which afterwards made me feel as though some of the glass which stuck in his ceiling and walls was inside me. I thought Valentine's views deplorable, selfish, and narrow; he thought mine deplorable, egotistical, and narrow. The beer-brewing bottle-buster invariably dismissed all of my remarks as Utopian hot-air. Valentine himself claimed authority on the Church, his father being a parson. Apart from the exhausting arguments, and Valentine's reduction of all human actions to the lowest level of selfishness, we remained friends, for he was always a kind and cheerful companion.

Mentally sick, unable to work or sleep or eat, dreading to look at any familiar face lest my shrinking smile of greeting meet with a snub, I wrote to the woman from whom the statements about myself had originated at Mrs. Courtney-Wrey's dance. I asked her if she would be kind enough to let me explain personally to her what I felt sure was an unhappy misunderstanding. She replied that she was unable to agree to my suggestion, adding that she did not see what good it would do. After another week of sleeplessness and desperation, I did something on sudden impulse which both intuition and pride declared was an unworthy thing, an action on a low level of selfishness: I went to a solicitor.

This gentleman, whose name was Lamprey, was large and, I thought, pompous. After he had listened to my recital, he said, seizing a pen, "We'll soon cut that old woman's corns."

He wrote at his desk for several minutes.

"This is a draft of a letter I suggest should be sent." The letter contained alarming phrases like "given our client considerable pain", "unless we receive a reply within four days, a writ for libel and defamation of character will be applied for". It scared me: I did not want it to happen.

"Now you go home until you hear from me," he ordered. "We will soon put a stop to that sort of thing! Good morning."

Two days later, after a brief note from Mr. Lamprey the lawyer, I was standing beside his roll-top desk, waiting while he read through correspondence which I imagined referred to the case of the farmer who had gone out just before. Mr. Lamprey looked up.

"Sit down," he said.

I sat down. When the other correspondence had been put aside, he said, accusingly, "You didn't tell me that this person against whom you allege slander was not a village woman, but a lady!"

I did not know what to reply to that; so I waited for him to continue. Had I not told him that she had been a guest at the dance of Mrs. Courtney-Wrey? The big, preponderant brown face, with the almost lifeless eyes, stared at me with a reserved expression. As I did not speak, he looked away, picked up a pencil, waggled it nervously between his fingers, and continued:

"Now I must advise you seriously to consider very carefully before you decide to institute any proceedings for slander and defamation! For one thing, any questionable behaviour in your past life will be known and exposed by the defence. Of that you may be very sure! Now let me ask you, Have you ever been a co-respondent in a divorce case? You say you have not. Very well. Have you ever been drunk? You say you have been drunk. Be sure that will be known. You tell me your father ejected you from his house—owing to a misunderstanding, you say. Will your father be prepared to corroborate that? You say you met this woman on the sands—you became friends. But what kind of friendship is it that begins by a chance meeting, a meeting which is, to say the least, unconventional? You say you made

enquiries about a furnished cottage, on her behalf in the village where you are living. The defence will naturally make the most of that. By the way, I had a talk with the other side's solicitors. They say in effect that you are a very bad hat. They say that you were seen going into this woman's cottage in pyjamas, in broad daylight. You were observed shaking mats against the garden wall outside. You tell me there has been no divorce. Very well. You also tell me that four years ago a married woman spent a fortnight in your cottage with you. Was a chaperone there?"

"No."

Mr. Lamprey's heavy face looked accusingly at me. Shaking a finger, and with an admonitory look, he continued:

"Be sure that the defence will make the most of that! Now, I advise you to reflect seriously before thinking further of any writ. Now this is a very important point: May I enquire if you brought letters of introduction with you when you came to live in North Devon?"

I had to admit that I had brought no letters of introduction.

"Ah!" remarked Mr. Lamprey. "Now you see what is confronting us! You came here with no letters of introduction. You behave in a bohemian manner—on your own admission, by the act of speaking to a woman on the sea-shore without being properly introduced to her. The defence will plead justification. You arrive without letters of introduction, and you behave in a bohemian manner! How, then, can you therefore expect to be invited into the company of ladies and gentlemen?"

I was bewildered by these words. Had I missed the entire point of the case, or had the lawyer? His previous reference to "cutting the old woman's corns" had jarred on me: now he seemed the other way round. But this, I felt, was probably due to a defect within myself. Mr. Lamprey continued:

"Why, I tell you frankly, I would not expect to find you in my house, among my wife and children, if you arrived without letters of introduction!"

Almost immediately he seemed to fall into a brown study: to come out of it with a jerk, and begin writing industriously.

"This is what I advise. We will send a letter to the other side's solicitors saying that it is a case of mistaken identity. We will suggest that their client has, yes mmm-m'yes has possibly

relied on reports that are untrustworthy, mmm'm, that he denies he has ever shaken mats outside any gate in yes'mmmmm sleeping attire. We will explain that our client came to live in North Devon to write fiction, on the advice of the late Lord Northcliffe——"

"I had a letter of introduction to Lord Northcliffe——" I began. "I was on the staff of *The Times*——"

"Oh, *The Times*. You did not tell me that!"

He wrote rapidly.

"We will explain that our client was on the staff of *The Times*, that the late Lord Northcliffe advised him yes'mmm-m'yes advised him to go into the country to develop his talent for writing. Mmmm'myes, that the—er—statements made—your client—caused considerable pain—our client—that our client requests an apology—and that yes'mmmmm and yes I think mmmmm'yes—a donation be given'mmm—North Devon Infirmary. And I think they will agree. I will write to you. Good morning."

Outside in the street I encountered Mrs. Courtney-Wrey. I was about to pass her with my eyes on the pavement when she smiled and said, "Why haven't you been to see us? Those absurd remarks! I'm so sorry they were made in my house. I said at the time I didn't believe them. It's a pity you have this reputation for immorality because it would have been so nice to have had you to my tennis parties later on. I'm glad you're standing up for yourself, and demanding an apology."

I stammered that I was sorry I had been the cause of so much trouble to her. She smiled, and said, "Come and see us soon, won't you?" I raised my cap, and hurried away in momentary happiness.

I wondered, as I went back to the cottage, how Julian would have reacted to Mr. Lamprey. I could hear the scornful *Intolerable insolence*! I envied Julian his proud disdain of the world, his single-mindedness, his devotion to Swinburne and Catullus, his intellectual arrogance, his uncaring destruction of the personal self by a passion for the things which were not marketable! Poor Julian: I often thought of him, thinking that if I had not been so self-absorbed, and shut away—so unfriendly in effect—things might have been different for him. I determined to begin the fourth and climatical book of the tetralogy that night, and

never again to re-enter the world of men and women. I would learn to see all things as the sun saw them—without shadows. Detachment—complete and absolute detachment! I walked the lanes and fields with my dog; but the walks were but animated mental problems.

About a week later I was sitting again on the chair beside Mr. Lamprey's roll-top desk hearing that "our client wishes us to say on her behalf that she willingly accepts the statements made by you on behalf of your client, and that she expresses regret for any pain caused thereby to your client". No donation would be made to the North Devon Infirmary.

"Well, here is the apology, as you can see for yourself. Her solicitor brought this to me personally, and as he tossed it on my desk, he said, 'Our client has plenty of money, and so I have agreed to pay your costs, as I don't see why otherwise you should have to work for nothing'."

I hoped my voice did not sound weak as I said, "I meet my own obligations where possible, and so if you will please tell me the charge for your services, I will write you a cheque now."

"You don't understand. Costs are usually paid in a case like this by the other side. Here is your apology, which is what you wanted. Their client will pay my costs."

"I will pay my own costs, thank you."

Mr. Lamprey's expression changed a little. "Oh, certainly, as you wish, of course. Er—it will be two guineas."

He got up to open the door for me. He bowed to me. I wrote the cheque in the clerk's office, took a receipt with the type-written apology, stuffed them into my pocket, and fled away out of the town on the Norton. The Norton had recently been overhauled by a new local garage, situated among fowls and ploughshares in a dark cob barn. I had taken it there, to help the young engineer, who was a beginner. The engine had been decarbonised, the brake-blocks and control cables had been renewed, the frame had been stripped and repainted with one coat of paint. For this work, taking under two days, I had been charged twenty pounds. It all seemed part of the spirit of the place.

I left the letter of apology in an envelope for Dr. O'Connor at his surgery. I was glad to be able to do this, because I knew that he must have felt discomfort since he had admitted me to

the club unofficially. Now, I thought with relief and a return of happiness, he would be cleared.

Two days later I called to see him. He was friendly as always, and he said, "By the way I showed several people the lawyer's letter of apology you left for me, and the reply was, 'Oh, that's nothing! We were in the office when that letter was composed.' Then Mrs.—no names, no packdrill—said to me, 'Well, if that man stays in the club, we regret to say that many engagements in the coming season will prevent our friends and ourselves from playing there.'" Doctor O'Connor looked at me quizzically. "That means, old chap, that I shan't get my daily exercise in the summer, for it's a very small club, as you know. If that family go out, it will mean more than half the membership is gone! And I'll not get my tennis!"

"But you must have your tennis, of course. It isn't right that one person should spoil the pleasure of eight or nine people, so I will not appear there again. I do not feel I should resign. My subscription will lapse."

"I'll tell them, old chap. I think that's awfully decent of you."

On the Norton I went back to the village, splashing through many red puddles on the high ground overlooking the grey sea wastes and the long blue promontory dimming away in the mist. I thought once again how right had been my instinct to avoid other people. Again and again I had made the same mistake: my sort of person was always lonely, and to try to be otherwise was to lose happiness or power.

It was nice to have somewhere to go for my meals, and also to be back in my cottage alone again. I seemed to be living by reacting away from other people all the time. I had my breakfast and lunch in solitary unimportance at the circular table of the postman's sitting room, served by his daughter, a tall girl of eighteen with long and lustrous auburn hair. She sang in the church choir. Her voice was surprisingly clear and pure. It was a sort of joke in the household that they were looking after a peculiar—as the daughter expressed it "mazed"—author of sorts who was always talking about fame and success and yet remained steadily unfamous and unsuccessful. Good-naturedly scornful or repressive ridicule was the attitude to most things I said. The gentle sexton said, at least five hundred times every month, "You'm a funny man, a very funny man."

What things you do say, Mr. Wiss'on, surenuff you be a funny man. 'T'es all that studying of books, you'm always studying of books, studying; books, studying of books. You be!" His wife, who usually talked at length to me, or at me, in a voice of repressed excitement, throughout the periods of tea and supper which I had with them at the kitchen table, was a very kind woman. She put up with much lateness and absence from meals on my part with unfailing good-humour. After a while I found I could read or muse under her amiable flow of words, shutting them off between ear-drum and brain. On Sunday there was always beef, well-roasted in the village way, its slices invariably concealed with a kind of brown gravy out of a packet, the nationally famous BISTO. I told them they ought to call their cottage BISTO, and that Great Britain should be renamed GREAT BISTO. Every Monday there was cold beef, and on Tuesday, shepherd's pie, beef rissoles, and occasionally cold brown beef. I did not enjoy eating alone; tea and supper were tolerable and occasionally enjoyable meals, for then I was in the homely atmosphere of the kitchen, sitting opposite the postman and perhaps holding forth to them all—my plainest statements of fact being received, as usual, with bantering incredulity and sometimes with hilarious laughter and the excited ringing treble of the daughter crying, "It's a dirty lie, Mister Wisson! Tidden true, you know! Is it, Mister Wisson?"

But when the affair of the tennis club occurred, they listened with a simmer of excitement and awe. Although they all lived in a different district, the names of the antagonists were names to be mentioned by the postmen only in hushed tones, with glances over his shoulder lest anyone be listening to what was being said, and the words be borne to the high-ups in whose very presence the humble gravedigger came near to trembling on occasion. He was honesty itself, entirely without protective guile.

When I saw Dr. O'Connor again, he said, "Well, I told them what you said about not wanting to spoil their tennis, and that you would therefore not appear again, and the reply was, 'Oh, so he can't keep up his bluff any more, eh?' "

Valentine, the ex-officer acquaintance, who lived with his wife and baby in the cottage once occupied by the middle-aged couple who had befriended me, told me that Mr. Lamprey was

his father's churchwarden. Apparently Mr. Lamprey and Valentine's father were often in conflict, over a question of the revision, or non-revision, of the Prayerbook. Once in a rage Mr. Lamprey had locked the Vicar in his vestry. Mr. Lamprey was a lay-preacher. "One day the old pater asked him if he knew a certain chap, and Lamprey said to the pater, 'We only call on the county'." According to Valentine, when the town war-memorial was unveiled, local ex-officers stood on one side, in uniform, and the other ranks on the further side. Temporary Major Lamprey, the senior officer present, took charge until the General arrived. While they were waiting there, the local Sanitary Inspector joined the group of ex-officers. He was in civilian clothes; he wore his military cross and other medals on the lapel of his coat. Major Lamprey surveyed with bland surprise the other officers in his group, before remarking in a loud whisper, "What is that man doing among officers and gentlemen—that man who cleans out our dustbins?"

I resumed my long walks over the countryside, and except for daily visits for food to the postman's cottage, went nowhere among people, except for the slightest contacts, and even those I avoided when I could. I could not write; the weeks went by, and nothing was done.

23

During the winter I read much of Joseph Conrad, and spent many a serene hour in my cottage at night, feet to the fire, and my cat and dog beside me, reading *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *The Rescue*, *The Arrow of Gold*, and *Tales of Unrest*. I was deeply impressed by *Youth*, and spent much time reading aloud to myself the noble passage which described the burning of the ship in the ocean night; and also repeating to myself the final paragraphs of *The Rescue*, where Lingard, after losing all he held dear in life, and learning that the ship with the woman he loves, but for whom he has betrayed himself, is taking a southerly course away from the tragedy, gives the order to "Steer North"!

As the year's end approached, my mother wrote and said it would be so nice if I could spare time to spend Christmas with

them. Locking the cottage door, after arranging firmly for the postman's daughter to feed Pie regularly, and for Albert of the Higher House to take Billjohn as a lodger again, I went to London, and thence to my father's home. It seemed ages since I had been away. Too much had happened since, to make me feel I belonged there any more. Mother said, after greetings, that she had a birthday present for me.

"Thank you very much, but please don't bother about birthdays any more, Mother. Honestly, I——"

"Oh, but I like to, dear—you are still my little boy."

"Oh, please, Mother darling——"

"You only call Mother 'darling' when you are unpleasant to her," remarked my sister, somewhat severely. "Can't you try to be decent?"

"I'll try to be as decent as you are to me, for example. Where is Father?"

"In his room, dear. Yes, do go and see him. Never mind about the present just now. I am sure you are tired. Oh, do be careful what you say to your father, won't you? Perhaps it would be best not to mention your books. He read the first one, and thought it quite good, but when he got to the point where you refer to the grandfather's death from alcoholism, he put the book down, saying, 'He is lampooning his own people, and his old school, and I refuse to read further.' So don't mention the books, will you, dear? It will only cause trouble. But he likes the short stories in the magazines about animals, he says you have your grandfather's love of nature. He knew Richard Jefferies, you know. Do be nice to Father, won't you? He always feels his children do not want him."

I went to my father's room, and knocked on the door.

"Well, and how do you like Devon?" he enquired, as he arose to offer me his hand.

"Oh, it's quiet and secluded, Father," I replied. "I do a fair amount of writing and walking, and observing things."

"Yes, so I see," replied Father. "You always were a boy for wild birds and animals. I still remember those gulls' eggs going off in your bedroom cupboard in nineteen-fourteen." He laughed. "Do you know, we thought at first they were Zeppelin bombs, a long way off."

I had brought those eggs back from North Devon in the May

before the War, when on holiday; and they had remained in my cupboard unblown when I left the following August to join my regiment. About November, when I was in the trenches, and the first battle of Ypres was nearly ended, the gulls' eggs had exploded in my cupboard. I remembered writing home to ask if any remained unburst, and if so, would my father blow them for my collection. Ever since, this had been a joke of my father's.

"I want to apologise for my bad behaviour when I was here last, Father."

"Oh, don't mention it, my dear boy. I thought it good for you to go, to help you to fall on your own feet. We need not refer to that period: you were young, it was a difficult time for all of us, and I acted for your own good."

"Well, I am grateful to you for what you did. It's lovely on the Atlantic coast."

"Have a drink? Or would you prefer to wait until after tea?"

"No thank you, Father, if you'll forgive me. I don't drink."

My father looked surprised for an instant only. "Oh well, please yourself, old man."

There seemed nothing else to say after I had told him of my cat and dog. My mother came into the room, smiling, and holding out a cardboard box for me. "Just a small present, dear. I thought you would be coming, so I kept them here for you."

"How very kind of you, Mother. I wonder what it is."

"You must open the box and see," said my father, who evidently shared the secret.

I opened the box, and took out six flannel shirts, all of which I saw at once to be too short in the arm and tail, like one I had left behind in my drawer when I had gone away.

"I remembered your saying that you liked one of the shirts you left in your drawer, because it had extra short sleeves, and you hated cuffs," my mother was saying, "so I had these copied from it, dear."

"Thank you very much indeed," I said. It was a shirt I had bought at Folkestone, three years before, a ready-made shirt to replace one I had then worn, which was wet. I had been swimming in the sea with all my clothes on for a bet.

"I hope they are all right, dear," said my mother.

I was hurt by the thought of her wasted effort; and this hurt made me feel slight irritation, for the hurt would have been

avoidable, like so much in life, by taking thought. I had either to tell the truth, or to suppress it. If I said what I thought, it would be only from the view-point of improving things for the future. *If way to the better there be, It enacts a full look at the worst*, Thomas Hardy had written in his latest book of Poems, which Sophy had sent me for my birthday. My mind had been fixed for some years now in the idiom that to look at the worst and to tell the truth was to be unpopular, awkward, and unhappy-making. There was the greatest precedent for the saying that only the truth could make a man whole; but few acted on this outside a church, if indeed they thought of it when inside once a week for an hour or two.

"Oh dear, I do hope they are all right," said my mother.

The old Folkestone shirt I had abandoned in my drawer was ready-made, it had a fourteen inch neck, which fitted, but I was six feet tall; and the shirt ready-made for the average Englishman with a fourteen inch neck would fit one about five feet two inches tall.

Both my parents were looking at me. "I wonder if they will cover my belly," I said.

"Your language," remarked my father, "is hardly that of a literary man," and laughed at his mild joke.

"Oh dear, I am so sorry, dear." She added, "Well, anyway, I hope the shirts will keep you warm."

"I'll tell you what," said Father. "I've got some old ones I don't want, and Mother shall cut the tails off and sew them on your shirts, so that your little knees shall always be covered!"

"Well, thank you very much," I said.

"Aren't you going to kiss Mother?" asked my sister.

I kissed my mother.

We had tea.

After tea, I said I thought I would go for a walk. "Oh, but you have only just come," protested my mother. "Father and I hoped you would tell us all about your new life."

"Yes, of course, Mother; but I have a slight headache, and if you'll forgive me, I'll go for a walk. I always walk ten or twelve miles every day."

"Well, try not to be too late," said my father, as I left about ten minutes later. I hurried over a grassy hill towards the direction of Julian's house. In about twenty minutes I was knocking

at the door, to be invited in by the voice of Julian's aunt. Mr. Warbeck was sitting before his fire, which roared as usual, the direct blaze being partly shut off by a fireguard in the shape of a shield of silk, with faded coat-armour on it. The old gentleman said, after greetings, "Well, I read your two novels, and I must admit I was considerably surprised——" he paused, while I prepared my face to look suitably blank with modesty—"yes, I was certainly surprised, even staggered if one might employ such a word, yes, I was—er, dumbfounded is perhaps a more apposite expression—nay, I was flabbergasted when I read certain criticisms of your books."

"Thank you very much, sir. There were certainly some bad reviews," I murmured, liking him more now that he had perceived my talent as a writer.

"Bad reviews?" he explained. "*Bad reviews?* My dear fellow, I assure you that even the adverse criticisms I read were far too generous. *Dandelion Days* is a farrago of the most utter bosh and nonsense, more suitable for *Comic Cuts* and the wastepaper basket of an amateur vegetarian settlement's monthly folk-sheet, than anything else I have ever had the misfortune to read, and how any self-respecting publisher was ever persuaded to print it, well—it beats me utterly!"

"Don't take any notice of what he says," laughed Julian's aunt, as she sewed comfortably by the fire. "I read them and liked them, anyway, although I must say I read also for what you were trying to get at, as for what you said."

"Thank you very much."

"Oh, Good Lord, yes," broke in the old gentleman, pulling his grey moustache. "Don't think, m'dear fellow, that I found them utterly unreadable. On the contrary, I recognised only too well some of the wretched influences which I have found manifest in action in the behaviour of that individual of whom I have the dire misfortune to be the parent."

"How is Julian?" I asked.

I learned that Julian was much the same. He lived or existed round about Fleet Street, making a daily journey to his father's house. Every day he came with a story about a job.

"My delightful son's powers of invention are wonderful, let me tell you, Williamson. Why he does not settle down to the comparatively respectable method of making money by writing

novels, I am at a loss to understand. Mark you, I have a considerable respect for your own powers of invention, but the palms must go, I am compelled to believe, to my son. His range over the possibilities of fiction are stupendous in their variety. One day he is about to get a job as sub-editor on an evening paper, another day he is on the point of selling a new literary weekly, yet another day he is about to set about learning to compose type, to bind books, to sell motorcars. His intentions, insofar as I can gather, include the writing of a revue for Mr. C. B. Cochran, and producing a play—which he is of course going to write first—for Matheson Lang to act. These details are but a few specimens of my son's matutinal chronicle of his ambitious and imminent history. What is to me so interesting is the detail, so realistic and circumstantial, that he builds around each episode of his future career. Every day the same situation confronts me; I am scornful, I am incredulous, I declare each visit to be the last occasion I will subsidise his activities. Not that my faithful visitor isn't grateful, oh Lord no! He is most deferential and grateful: when he has acquired the dough, as he calls it, it is then back to his, er—h'm—literary and artistic activities."

The old gentleman looked with stern unhappiness at me. I did not stay long; it was too hot before that blazing coal fire.

In London, wandering about by myself one afternoon, I saw before me a familiar figure, the straight back under the neat black coat, the curl-cluster of surely—Irene? I hastened past her, stopping to look in a window where shooting sticks, riding whips, and hunting horns were displayed among carved animal and bird heads. I saw, in the glass, that she had stopped too. It was Irene.

"Hul-lo, H.W.! My dear H.W.! What are you, of all people, doing in Piccadilly?"

We had tea in the Piccadilly Hotel, where I had not been since the War, and talked and listened as de Groot played the violin.

"Your Barleybright, do you remember her? You didn't answer her letter, H.W.! We live at my mother's villa, near Pau in the Pyrenees now. She's at school, and waiting for the snow, she lives for ski-ing and mountain climbing. We are not far from Tarbes—do come and stay someday, promise you will? You promised to come and see us when we were in Cornwall last

summer, but you never came. Every day she used to say, 'I wonder if I'll hear the beat of the Norton today, Mummie?' Why didn't you come, H.W.?"

"I thought you didn't really want to see me," I said lamely.

"You're just the same diffident, shrinking, hypersensitive oddmedodd! Should we write if we didn't want you, now? We are both very fond of you, H.W. Didn't you know? Barleybright's fidelity is quite a joke now, almost. She has the photograph you gave her, you on your motorcycle, always by her bed. The Barleybright's grown into a very creditable young woman, let me tell you! They've chosen her for the Carnival Queen this year, and she has lots and lots of beaux, but won't look at one of them. See what you're responsible for, H.W.!" I thought Irene was a flatterer. "Well, how have you been getting on? Happy?"

"Not really. And you?"

"Not really. But I don't expect to be." She smiled happily at me.

I hesitated. Had I not resolved on my twenty-sixth birthday to be restrained as a Conradian hero? "*Steer north,*" said *Lingard*. I would never babble about myself again. Dare I tell Irene about Annabelle; she would understand. No, it was too long a story, and I was tired, walking about all day aimlessly on pavements—although now, since meeting Irene, the fatigue had gone. No, I would say nothing: I sipped the China tea and thoughtfully crushed with my spoon the lemon slices floating in the cup.

Irene and I parted soon, as she had an appointment with someone. "A Belgian baron, my dear, and such a nice boy—poor dear, he lost a leg in the War, flying, and now rushes round and round motor tracks in an enormously loud and fast car, trying to go faster than anyone else. But the poor dear enjoys himself. I suppose you think me a very silly person, H.W.? And who would believe that it is all due to loving one man too much? Ah well. How are the owls? Have you seen Julian? He wrote to me several times, and I felt a brute, but I did not know what to reply. The War upset so many of you boys, didn't it? How is Billjohn? He's grown up now, he was such a charming little fellow, always rolling over on his back. It's no world for a sensitive creature, is it? Well, I must be going. Thank you so much

for the lovely tea and talk, H.W. No, not good-bye, my dear—promise to write?—truly, cross your heart?—here's the address, don't lose it—the Barleybright and I loved your book of short stories—she's got all your first editions in a row, *and* yourself on that funny motorcycle whose noise you were so proud of—au revoir, *do* see us in Laruns next spring! Oh, and write to your faithful Barleybright, promise? And don't lose that address!"

We clasped hands, and I hastened away, walking up Regent Street as far as Oxford Circus before stopping to ask myself why I was going there.

Things were easier in my father's house nowadays, but I was uneasy there. An attempt to write at night in the room where my first book had been written with such fervour and secrecy—my mother called in to sit on the bed and listen to the chapters, and always saying how beautiful and sad the story was—was not successful nowadays. Everything in my room was the same, kept so by Mother's care, even the card table which I had used as a desk, shaking ink over it until the green baize was a mass of blots. Everything was the same; except myself.

I went to the Tomorrow Club Thursday night meeting, now in the Caxton Hall—the Club had expanded—and sat silent and aloof. What a fool I had been in the old Long Acre days, making egotistically silly criticisms of most of the speakers who had come there to give free lectures to young literary aspirants and old literary desperants and bores. With shame I recalled how a gentleman named Owlett had spoken on *The Need for More Indignation in Modern Literature*. This had seemed to me bad advice, and I had got up afterwards to declare that it was to be hoped that no young writers would heed Mr. Owlett's dismal hootings. Playing to the gallery! And what an idiot I had been, in a voice high with nervousness, to try and be smart with Bernard Shaw, asking him, *What is Truth?* and not a line of his work had I read! And worst of all, complete humiliation when I had claimed, in a speech, Arnold Bennett as a friend, declaring that he had said to me, that very morning, *My dear boy, I shall retire from descriptive writing, you have outclassed me*. Unknown to me, Arnold Bennett's sister had been there, and she had trounced me properly afterwards for my invention. I remembered I had eaten no food that day, and had heard my voice speaking as from a great distance. No restraint, no sense!

Why had I come back to the Tomorrow Club? For there, coming towards me, was Arnold Bennett's sister, and as I was slinking away she came up to me and said, "I read your book, and now I understand that what seemed merely egotistical falsehoods before was really your sense of fun. And I was so unkind to you."

"Oh no, you said only one tenth to me of what I said to other people."

"Mr. Williamson, it was a lovely book, and I've wanted ever since reading it to tell you so."

It was so unexpected and sweet that the foolish tears started in my eyes, but I got rid of them by blowing my nose discreetly.

My father had usually deprecated my boyhood tears, and my sister also had laughed, though not meaning any unkindness; in vain had I consoled myself by thinking how Nelson had shown tears easily. It was my last appearance at the Tomorrow Club; I never went back. From a small beginning in a Long Acre room grew an organisation called the P.E.N. Club, which I read of, but never visited. The Tomorrow Club gave its shelter in those early days to other solitaires, who later made a name for themselves in literature. One comes to memory, a queer little silent woman with sad face and thick glasses, dressed in odd dark velvet clothes, sitting usually quiet and alone. She spoke to me once about Jefferies, but it was during an interval in the weekly lecture, and the wilder section to which I belonged was about to go out to a nearby pub. We did not speak again, for I avoided her, and years later I saw her photograph in a newspaper, when she was dead, and then only did I know her name, which was Mary Webb.

24

Walter de la Mare asked me to his house the Sunday after Christmas. It was lovely there. Many people sat around in two rooms, there was laughter, games, and young faces, among them pretty, dark-eyed Jinny, dusky like a young Spanish gipsy dancer, merry and kind and friendly; there was Dick, grave and kind, just down from Oxford; and a

younger boy with comic eyes and innocently humorous face, called Colin. Twenty people were present in the candlelight, somewhere among them was the poet, unobtrusive, a wise child among his dear children and friends. Suddenly amidst the merriment I would see him sitting, talking quietly, yet alertly, in some corner, apart from the merriment; a moment later, and the corner was vacant. Chin on hand, he would be seen, sometime later, beside a bookcase, while a first-edition enthusiast looked at title page or binding; or withdrawn from the merriment with one or another of his quieter friends, listening to a fugue of Bach on the piano, or Kreisler on the gramophone. Laughter, friendliness, and movement in candlelight; books, and books, and books on the shelves; the supper table shining, dozens of plates and glasses, bowls of salad and fruit, a sideboard loaded with cakes, pies, and cold roast foods. I sought him out and told him that his verse was Shakespearian in quality. He was modestly attentive, a spirit of dark quicksilver. I saw him as moonlight; myself as the unrisen morning star. Many times had I declaimed his poems aloud to myself in my cottage. When I returned the next Sunday I brought with me a copy of his *Memoirs of a Midget*, and asked him, after hesitation, if he would inscribe it for me. He wrote, after my name, *If it had been, how gladly it would have been*, and seeing my puzzlement, explained that he had not given me the book, but if he had, would have done so gladly. I thanked him, thinking that now I would have on my shelves, with the volumes of Hardy, Jefferies, Conrad, Tomlinson, Compton Mackenzie, and others, a book inscribed by an immortal poet. Browsing among his books, which flowed upstairs and over all the walls of the house, I found a small brown pocket edition of Edward Thomas's *Richard Jefferies*, inscribed by the author *To W. J. de la M.*, and this I was lent; and after reading, returned by registered post, as I knew how he must value the book of a dead friend, and how wrong of me it was to accept a loan of it.

Dick, just down from Oxford, told me he was working in a publisher's office above the Adelphi arches. I went to see him, finding him in an ancient building, in a room small, dark, and heated by an old gas fire that snuckled and snored. It was so dark and oppressive a room that I began to think how I might get him out of it—perhaps through my books, somehow—but had no practical idea, unless we set up publishing together rare

editions in my cottage. I took him part of an uncompleted manuscript, saying half-honestly, that it might be very bad. He read the first few chapters of the fantasy of the spirits of air, water, and earth, and said he would very much like to see the rest of the book; this made me shy, or perverse, and instead I took him the first chapters of a book I was writing, called *The Otter's Saga*. Dick, as I now called him, asked if he might show them to Roger Ingpen, his uncle, one of the partners of the publishing firm. But I had doubts about the book: it must be rewritten. Captain Roderick Courtney-Wrey, a squire with whom I had a slight acquaintance in Devon—I had been to a dance given by his lady wife—had read and annotated the first draft, and written several valuable criticisms in pencil on the typescript, and also facts which I intended to work into the story. He said that he did not care much about "humanised" animals in books. Obviously he had not thought much of it, for he had declined the dedication, diplomatically saying that a dedication to a Master of Otterhounds would be more suitable. I told Dick the entire book must be rewritten, and promised to let him see it when I had done so.

Who else was there to see in London? I stayed with my young cousin Arthur in Surrey, and we went beagling together, running over the furrows behind the excitable little hounds. A girl I saw running with classical Grecian grace inspired me to write a short story, about four thousand words long, which I began and finished in the evening after returning home. I enjoyed the running, but not the thought of the hare run stiff and lost somewhere in a garden outside Redhill.

I took a liking to my cousin Arthur. We slept in the same double bed, sharing a pair of headphones to his self-made wireless crystal set. It was thrilling and marvellous to lie with a finger plugged in one ear and the receiver pressed against the other ear, listening to the music of the Savoy Dance Bands in the darkness, dreaming of the sandhills and the Atlantic breaking in white lines along the coast, whereon Maddison walked with Mary Ogilvie. It was fine to snuggle down in bed, feeling that Arthur was beside me, a companion with whom I was in so perfect an accord.

This feeling did not last, however, after Arthur had told me that his father did not approve of me.

"He heard rumours from someone in Devon," said Arthur. "And said you were a bad companion for me. In fact, he solemnly warned me against your influence the other day—said you were a Bolshy, jeering at all the decencies of life."

"Are you telling the truth?"

Seeing my dismay, cousin Arthur hastened to add, "He doesn't understand you, he thinks you're somewhat mentally deficient."

"My God, I don't think he's mentally deficient, I know it! Who wants to listen to his damned silly naughty-little-repressed-boy stories? My mother told me he was dropped on his head, poor little fellow, as a baby, but even so, this defamation of my character is too much, my dear Arthur. I also think it's damned bad manners."

"Where are you going?" I was out of bed, and pulling on my trousers.

"Just going." I slipped braces over pyjama jacket. "To rid you of a bad companion."

"No, please stay, old boy. Father doesn't understand you, really."

"Mentally deficient! Intolerable insolence! I won't stay here another moment!"

"Please, old boy, I'm sorry I told you. I meant it as a joke. Please stay."

I drew off my trousers, and got into bed again.

"Though while we are on the subject," went on Arthur, reflectively, "I think I ought to say what I think. And that is, you are doing yourself no good with your friends in Essex. That girl, whatshername, Annabelle, seems to me to be not your sort at all."

I jumped out of bed, and pulled on my trousers once more.

"Oh, come on," said Arthur. "What good is friendship if one cannot speak one's mind to a friend."

In bed, in the silence, I began to think.

Sophy had asked me to visit Tollemere Park, and after telling myself I would not go, I had nearly made up my mind to go. I did not want Arthur to know I was going back there, after what I had told him. And I was angry that my uncle, for whom I had a sort of affectionate contempt—to me he was merely a narrow-minded, kind-hearted, rather stupid London business man—considered me to be that bogey of the Victorian bour-

geoisie, a "bad companion". To Arthur's protestations and affirmations of friendship I was unresponsive. I had hoped we might be friends; but the gap between us was too wide. Had he not warned me against the perils of egotism and of being a law unto myself? He was in danger of becoming a younger edition of his father, I warned him. In fact, he was somewhat priggish, I said. "And you're intolerably conceited," he retorted. We quarrelled, and then we were silent, listening to the dance bands of the Savoy Hotel. At midnight we made friends.

"I shall have to go tomorrow, Arthur. I've got to begin the final book of the tetralogy. You wait and see when that book's written! Ashamed of my reputation, are they? Well, one day they will all be boasting the relationship!"

"That's what I meant about conceit, if you'll pardon me mentioning it, old man. I understand, of course, but to others it sounds conceited. I'm only warning you."

"Thanks for the warning. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

In the morning, walking to the station bag in hand, my old loose felt hat perched on the side of my head, slouching along beside the upright Arthur wearing his Old Boy's tie correctly tied, one yellow leather glove worn, the other carried, felt hat-brim stiff and slightly turned down, looking exactly like an advertisement of a well-dressed young man from the politer suburbs, I felt superior, and slightly sorry for Arthur. "Good-bye, Henry. I regret I told you what Father said, and so upset you. Only I couldn't help feeling rather sorry for you, that's all."

"My dear old chap, I am a damned fool, and always was. Also I was rude about your father. Give the old boy my love, and tell him to bring his jokes up to date, the date being, say, nineteen-twelve. It was so nice of you, I loved the walks and listening to the wireless, but don't marry that girl you told me of, get rid of your purity ideal or it will sterilise your natural happiness. Ideals are dangerous! Be warned by my appalling example! G'bye, old boy."

"Come back sometime, Henry, Father doesn't really mean—"

"I know, old boy. I don't really mind. I'll come back, if I may, later on."

"Please do!"

The whistle blew, the train drew out, leaving cousin Arthur

standing correctly on the platform. I looked out once and waved. He raised his hat, correctly. Poor young Arthur, I hoped he would be happy. In the train I opened my paper, and read that Wilfrid Ewart, late of the Scots Guards, and the author of *Way of Revelation*, had been killed in Mexico. It was as though I had lost a friend.

25

During the dreary journey into Essex, first through the appalling mass-mess of civilisation that was London seen eastwards from Liverpool Street Station, I determined in future to be aloof, genial, and imperturbable. A tailor in Conduit Street had made me a new hunting coat of dark West of England cloth, and I had also a new pair of boots with patent leather tops. I was uneasy about those boots. When tried on for the first fitting, they had been too big round the calf. A hand almost could be thrust between boot-top and knee-button. The bootmaker assured me that they would be a perfect fit after a slight alteration, and as time was short, I asked that they be sent direct to Essex. I arrived the night before the meet, and was met by Sophy and the General in the Daimler at Chelmsford station.

Was I deceiving myself again, or had Sophy also made a determination to be aloof, genial, and imperturbable? It was somewhat disconcerting; but soon we were on the friendliest terms. Sipping a whiskey and soda in the house,

"Well, boy, what have you been doing with yourself? Why didn't you answer my letter before? Busy writing new masterpieces, or have you fallen in love again?"

"Again? Have I ever fallen in love with anyone?"

"Don't worry, there's plenty of time. You will one day. You are not mature yet. Now tell me all about yourself. When is the Book Three being published? That book will make you famous."

"I'm rewriting it now. J. D. Beresford said the other version was too hastily written. He was right. It's lovely to be here again, Sophy."

I looked round the hall; the log fire was roaring in the wide hearth. "You look younger every time I see you." No more of

Annabelle, and her callous mocking. I hoped and feared she would be away. I took Sophy's hand, and held it. Her face glowed, and she laughed in her throat. She was sweet. I drank the rest of the whiskey, which I had poured myself. Then I saw my parcel on the oak chest.

"Oh, they're boots, are they? Annabelle and I wondered what they were."

Making my breathing steady, I asked if Annabelle had been doing any hunting.

"Yes, rather! She left today for Melton Mowbray—an invitation to the Cottesmore country. A girl at her school asked her. Mother signed 'yours truly' to the letter of invitation, so I had doubts, they are war-profiters, and apparently rolling in money; but Annabelle's eighteen now, and has left school, and seemed keen to go, so of course I didn't stand in her way. A young man up there, I fancy. Raymond's here for leave, so Queenie and he will be going about a lot together, and we'll have the place to ourselves. I hope it won't be too dull for you."

"Rather not!"

There seemed little else to say.

"Tired, boy? Go rest yourself. You know your room, don't you? I think you'll find everything there. Ring if you want anything."

"May I have another drink, please?"

"By all means—help yourself."

So Annabelle had left just before I had arrived. It was hopeless for me to think of her; I always knew it; and yet it had always seemed that—anyhow, Annabelle had gone to fashionable Melton,—Annabelle who nowadays was a different edition of the girl I had first seen wearing ready-made Swears and Wells boots and breeches. They had soon been cast; I could imagine her riding astride in her wide-brimmed hard hat, black coat, brown breeches, and straight-sided black boots. I helped myself to and swallowed another whiskey. I looked boldly at Sophy. She lowered her eyes.

"Well, how have you been getting on, old man? Any news of Devon?"

It was wonderful what whiskey did to my personality, completely changed it from a boy to an old man in a few minutes.

"Mrs. Courtney-Wrey asked me, to my surprise, to her dance."

"Why to your surprise? Did you go?"

"Oh yes, rather. It was a nice dance. I like Mrs. 'Roddy' Wrey, don't you? She has a pleasing direct manner of speaking what she really thinks. She said to me, 'It's a pity you have this reputation for immorality, because it would have been so nice to have had you to my tennis parties later on'."

"I don't believe a word of what you're saying!" Sophy's cheeks flushed.

"That's what she said. I thought it most sporting of her!"

"Come, now, it's time you stopped inventing such things. People won't believe a word you say, if you don't control your fancy a bit more."

"Mrs. 'Roddy' said it so nicely, in the friendliest way. It was after I had been slung out of the tennis club."

"Slung out of the tennis club? But whatever for?"

"Immorality, cowardice, drunkenness, and a tendency to bigamy or even trigamy."

"You are just being perverse. I should not have let you drink that whiskey, I can see."

"Anyway, Mrs. 'Roddy' asked me to go and see them at Pidickswell, again. Cheerio!" I waved my glass of whiskey at Sophy.

"Well, finish your peg, and we'll talk about it later. Bay—the General—is here to dinner. You'll meet his daughter to-morrow night. You two should get on together, for she is intellectual, like you. Only I hope you will curb your imagination. I am afraid you do not altogether improve with time, my dear."

I felt Julian's face superimposed on my own, and I grunted "Humph".

Sophy seemed hurt. It never occurred to me in those days that most people wanted others to be better than themselves. I swallowed the rest of the whiskey, and decided that there were several things upon which I might attempt to improve Sophy, as she had attempted to improve me. For instance, her use of the word "common", applied to a woman who had joined the Badminton club in the Assembly Rooms. The woman had turned out to be the best player, and had partnered the General to the finals in the tournament. Also Sophy did not apparently know that "yours truly" was the normal suffix to a letter from one who had not met her, while "yours sincerely" in the circumstances would have shown a lack of punctilio. However.

"Up you go, or you'll be late," said Sophy. "No, no more whiskey!"

I leapt up the stairs four at a time.

It was pleasant in a hot bath, and I lay there in sleepy luxuriance until I heard the second gong thrumming downstairs, and got out to find that the water was chilly. Five minutes later, pushing the last of the gold studs through my shirt, I ran downstairs, apologising for my lateness. Sophy was in a black dress, looking very fresh and lively, while Queenie was in pale blue. She greeted me softly, with an ingenuous lift of her azure eyes, holding out a hand to be taken and pressed by me, a man. Her cheeks were delicately flushed, her eyes bright, her golden hair slightly disarranged. She and Raymond had been enjoying themselves over and around the pingpong table, judging by the way bats and cushions lay on the floor and the table was staggered across the room. Raymond's face I thought too unnaturally composed; he was breathing fast. He was short and sturdy, he had thick auburn hair and auburn eyebrows, curious pointed ears, and eyes of an unusual warm brownness. A sub-lieutenant now, I could almost see him as a commander with auburn hair growing out of his ears and nostrils.

It was strange to be wearing evening clothes again, it had an alert bracing effect, combined with the Burgundy and the port, and a long cigar. Why had I ever become a hermit? At Sophy's suggestion, in the drawing room, I fetched my new boots to look at them. The interiors were slippery with french chalk. It was difficult to pull them on, although my socks were thin, and of silk. Once on, it took Raymond and Bay several minutes to pull them off again. Sitting on a settee, grasping it firmly, I was drawn all over the room, laughing weakly.

On returning to Tollemere Park after the next day's run—which was uneventful, for my hired horse was well-schooled, and I followed the rest of the field—the new boots were immovable. Jacks were useless. Foolishly I was wearing socks of a silk-wool mixture. My feet were swelled by the unaccustomed exercise. The butler heaved and pulled valiantly, ignoring my protests that his trousers and cuffs were being ruined by the clay. At last, thoroughly dirty and red in the face, we retired to the bathroom, and I held my legs under the cold tap. When it was deemed that my feet had shrunk, the struggle was renewed

with additional grips of hand towels. For half an hour he and Raymond puffed and grunted and lugged, and then the butler had to go and supervise the laying of the table for a dozen guests. The right boot by this time had been shifted about an inch and a half, so that my arch was fixed in a most painful position. In desperation I cut the stitches, and was free. As for the other boot, it might have been human; for when I tried for the last time to remove it before using the knife, it came off almost easily.

Among the guests for dinner was the General's daughter, a polite and amiable young woman with horn-rimmed spectacles, who at first spoke alertly upon a number of subjects that did not interest her, while I sat on my hands, not easy with her, and trying not to say anything that might not be of a superficial nature. The party began to go better when Raymond, who had been eyeing the General blandly and treating him with scrupulous politeness, suddenly, after receiving a glance of languishing tenderness from Queenie, became droll in what evidently was an approved way. He balanced glasses on his head; he threw up salted almonds and caught them deftly in his mouth; he pretended to rip off his waistcoat buttons one at a time with a realistic sound of ripping cloth; he imitated animal cries presumably to be heard in the Far East; he told stories of comic argument in two voices; and generally was entertaining in a way that kept us amused and laughing. All I could do was to imitate bagpipes by pinching my nostrils with one set of fingers and jabbing my adam's apple with the other hand while singing. I tried that in a break of the other fellow's foolery, and ceased halfway through *The Campbells are Coming!* as Sophy did not look amused, while Queenie remarked serenely, "You *are* a ninny!" I wondered if Sophy's casual reference to Raymond being the younger son of an Irish peer had anything to do with her tolerance of what I felt to be "not quite the thing" in myself. Sophy had advised me against buying a russet-brown tweed riding coat, suggesting a neutral grey instead, with the advice, *Your sort needs to dress as unobtrusively as possible.* My "act" of bagpipes was a flop; while Raymond's showing-off was fully approved of. Raymond was continuously jumping up from his seat and walking about the room, grabbing food and eating as he fooled, gnawing a pheasant's wing with his teeth and the

next moment waving it like a conductor's baton. When I attempted to tell Queenie how the Indian captain with the steel racquet at the Combe tennis tournament had conducted the Felix Hotel band on Armistice night with a poker, Sophy told me not to talk so much; but while she said it, her hand touched my wrist delicately, intimately, with a tender glance behind a flutter of eyelids. It was part of the theme of female suppression of the male, I supposed; votes for women had arrived, with short skirts, free love, cocktail parties, and the slogan of society, or that small portion with which I had a slight acquaintance, was *If you can't be good, be careful.*

The General was quietly enjoying it all. He sat there, crumb-bling bread with the fingertips of his left hand. I imagined that most of the friends of his generation had died in the Retreat, and in the first battle of Ypres. I felt a remote affectionate concern for the General, although I deprecated this feeling within myself, as it implied a criticism of Sophy and Queenie, of my hostess and her daughter; in particular of Sophy, who had been so hospitable to me, so tolerant of my defects, of my gaucheries, and of my selfish lack of affection.

"Well, wise child," said Sophy to me, when we were sitting alone by the fire for a moment. "Do you understand Woman yet? with a capital W? Still on the defensive?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what you were like as a baby," said Sophy. She laughed. "You must have been an odd little creature." She looked at me amusedly, her eyes bright. "Anyway, whatever you fancy you think now, I can assure you that you would not have got very far in the world if it hadn't been for Woman! Now be a good boy, and give the General a game of snooker—he likes you, you know. But take my advice, and don't drink any more whiskey!"

Sophy, of whom hitherto I had been as cautious as I had been of Queenie, seemed in the days that followed to be gentle and meditative like the Annabelle of those rare moments which had bound me to her. I had told her about the Club, and she now believed me. She said that it was up to one to behave always so that such incidents in future would not be possible. Sophy, I realised, was genuinely a friend. She seemed somehow to be

younger than Annabelle. Sophy picking violets from the cold frame in the kitchen garden looked like a happy young girl, shy as she spoke to me in a voice low and musical with happiness. I was happy, too, in a quiet sort of negative contentment. One day, said Sophy in a soft voice, one day you will meet someone you will love and want to marry; until then, and she flushed slightly, I will look after you, if you would like me to. Sophy confessed shyly that she understood me better now, as she held a bunch of warm wet violets for me to smell. Tenderly her fingers worked them into my button-hole.

"‘Them stinking violets’, as Jorrocks says," she murmured. "What, haven't you read Surtees? You lucky young man—what a treat is in store for you! That's your line of country, too, you know—once you are sure of yourself."

There were threads of grey in Sophy's dark hair. I saw Annabelle's eyes in her eyes, but eyes that were soft and so kind. How old was she, I wondered. I persisted that she should tell me, to tease her, as she teased me.

"Ah, much too old for you, my dear!"

I enjoyed her confession and felt a strange tinge of brutality arising in me. I slapped the General's borrowed boots, with their mahogany tops, with the whale-bone handle of my hunting whip.

"Tell me your age, Sophy." I insisted that she must tell me. Sophy looked directly at me and told me with a smile. "You look about twenty-one," I said. She laughed. Sophy really was young in heart.

"Will you help me feed the ducks, boy?"

I said I would love to help her feed the ducks. Did the General help her feed the ducks?

"Sometimes, why do you ask?"

"I suppose it is because I am in his boots." I added, after a pause, "He is decent, isn't he?"

"He's a gentleman," replied Sophy, quietly.

"An English gentleman, which is better," I said, feeling that Julian was very near me. Sophy did not like the slight false-mocking tone. "A Christian English gentleman, which is best of all." Sophy looked unhappy, the corners of her mouth were drooping. I kissed her cheek lightly. "Don't worry, my dear, I'm not going to say anything outrageous. I don't, about people, you

know; only of the structure which often despoils people. And you mustn't mind if I rag you, for you rag me enough, you know."

"Only because it isn't good for you to take yourself so seriously, my dear."

"Madam, I am an artist, and therefore I am serious about the stock-in-trade of my art, which are the feelings, thoughts, aims, and hopes of this machine. This machine is I; I take myself seriously."

"I agree you should take your art seriously, but not everything you may think or do. After all, there are others in the world beside yourself. That implies the first principle of good manners. Thus Bay, who is as you say a gentleman, lives by the rule that other people's feelings are more important than one's own."

"That idea is the mainspring of all poets and artists; though to their age it may sometimes seem paradoxical. An instinct for form, in other words."

"Well, I'm afraid I don't know enough about poets to be able to say," replied Sophy, in a tone of voice that seemed to suggest that my remark was not quite in good taste. So I persisted:

"The poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind; not the City of London bankers."

"Now you're getting into one of your silly moods, I'm afraid."

"Very well, here's another line of thought. The General will make an excellent husband for some lucky woman."

Sophy flushed. "You are a horrid little creature at times, aren't you?"

"Always!" I said, with an idiot's grin.

Sophy laughed. "You've missed your vocation. You should have been an actor."

"I am an actor."

She gave me a winsome look. "Has the story of the mouse appeared in the Royal Magazine yet? I've been looking out for it. It's one of your best."

"The last I heard about it was a letter from the editor saying that if he dared to print it, he would have to ask permission to alter some of the 'provincial expressions apparently in use among the lower orders in Devonshire'. I suppose he means by this the good old honest English expressions, of the sort that Shakespeare used. It hasn't been placed in America, yet. The New York

agent wrote to the London agent, asking him to try and persuade Williamson—that's me—"not to be selfish". He meant, of course, that old men, rats, mice, etc., are not popular subjects, and don't bring in dollars—not yet, anyhow."

"Then you haven't sold any more to the American magazines?"

"No, I wrote about twenty in all, and they didn't want them. *The Lone Swallows* hasn't sold, either—just about a hundred and twenty copies."

"I lent it to Bay. He likes your nature writing."

"But 'not the novels'."

"Well, I suppose like most normal people, he reads seldom, and when he does, he wants to read only about what one calls 'our class'."

"Really? The General told me the other day that his favourite author was Edgar Wallace, who writes almost exclusively of the class of people known as thieves, crooks, thugs, and wide boys."

Sophy measured out kibbled grain for the ducks from the bin in the harness room.

"Don't be a perverse child," she said, winningly. "You're just being all the time a very naughty little thing. You want a good spanking."

"And you need a good hiding with this whip of mine. Isn't that what usually happens to the heroines in the literature of your class? Who is your favourite author, Ethel M. Dell?"

"You are not attractive when you attempt to be satirical, my dear boy. Be your nice self again."

"I haven't a nice self."

Annabelle's riding saddle and bridle were hanging, neat, soaped, and burnished, on the third peg from the door. What delirious delight if in that little room it had been Annabelle beside me, asking me to kiss her!

I remained passive. Did Annabelle see my lips quiver, my eyes fearful of rebuff, as Sophy's now?

"Don't be unkind to me, boy, I can't bear it," said Sophy, unhappily. She looked as though I had struck her a blow. She looked most unhappy. I heard her words again—*Bay, who is as you say a gentleman, considers always that other people's feelings are more important than one's own.* I kissed Sophy, saying good-bye to Annabelle's image in the air.

I sat in the Blue Room at Tollemer with its four-poster bed, tapestries, thick carpet, and white-tiled bathroom leading off through one door, and dressing room through another. A decanter of whiskey with a syphon of soda stood on my bed-head table, with four books. In the six weeks of my stay I had not opened the books or removed the stopper of the decanter.

Nearly every morning since the end of the fox-hunting season I had gone to write in my room, at the leather-topped table by the wall. I was trying to write the fantasy conceived by Maddison, the ex-soldier whose story in the tetralogy also was getting no further forward. Maddison had succeeded where I had failed; he had kept the faith, while I had tried to compromise. I was the only living person who could complete *The Star-born* for him; and day after day I tried to write, in vain. I paced the room, lit cigarettes, stared through the window, with its view of willow trees and swans on the lake. Peacocks sometimes walked on the nearer lawns, or flew into the great cedar below the terrace. I could not write; all I wrote, even in my journal, seemed unreal and mannered. I closed it with distaste.

In the past, my journal had been like a friend, to whom I had poured out my hopes, fears, and aspirations. Idly glancing back into some of the pages, I found I could not read them. Indeed, even the knowledge of their existence gave me a feeling of wishing to obliterate them from my consciousness. No wonder Annabelle, reading the pages in Devon, had made no comment, beyond a mere *Very amusing*. I thought of how Devon had changed for me, and sighed. The spring was there now, and I was not in the midst of it. I felt I had betrayed the spirit of Richard Jefferies.

I was putting the book in the drawer of the writing table when there came a slight knock on the door. *Hullo*, I cried, and went to open it. Annabelle stood there.

"*Hullo*," she said softly. "Am I disturbing the Brain?"

"The Brain is completely addled."

Annabelle hesitated. She was dressed in white, and her hair was plaited and tied up in two "doorknockers", with red ribbon, as when I had first seen her: after I had fallen in the ditch on Pickles' friend Percy's long-tailed dyspeptic horse.

"Care for a game of tennis?" asked Annabelle, raising her eyebrows slightly. She stood still, her heels together. She wore a new white dress, and white silk stockings. She held a racquet and red string-bag of tennis balls in her hand. Annabelle had returned from the Shires the night before.

"I'll change, and be down in a minute," I said, adding, "I'm not much good on a hard court."

"The grass court is dry enough, Willie. They cut it and rolled it this morning. It's quite dry now, I've just been to look."

The grass was beginning to grow in the worn-out turf of the park, and the fallow deer among the oaks and chestnuts were grazing with the ponies and hunters. We had played, Annabelle and I, a fast hard sett, and then another sett, and now we were resting on the grass. I felt the sun warm on my face, on all my body. I stroked a daisy growing at the corner of the tennis court, which the knives of the mower had spared. It had been a very good sett. I lay on my elbow on the grass, not looking at Annabelle as she sat cross-legged, white skirt stretched over knees, hands in lap, looking at me. The tender sunshine seemed to float me in its happiness, flowing into me and buoying my heart with a joy that was almost unbearable in its dreamlike reality. As in a dream I heard my voice speaking of the daisy, which was myself, quiveringly strong and happy in the sunshine of love. I'll pick it, said Annabelle. No, no, my voice pleaded, it is so happy. Think, Annabelle—the winter—and now it has risen—to the sun-god——.

Annabelle was no longer mocking; I was living a miracle: Annabelle felt as I was feeling, the sunshine and I and daisy and Annabelle were one now. Her eyes were tender, her face was glowing with an inner light. Her lips were parted, she was smiling without knowing she smiled, she was looking at me and I was looking at her, and we were both breathing quickly, in the warm sunshine. I dared not speak. I dared not move. I dared not look at Annabelle's eyes now.

Never had I played such good tennis, it seemed to me. Very few of my terrific exhibition or swank shots had gone into the net or into the lake sixty yards beyond the court. Annabelle had been one of the champion players at her school, and I had beaten her. She had challenged me to another sett. My back-hand top-

spin drives had whipped an inch over the net, and zipped an inch or two inside the back line; my cannonball service had been even faster, making her grin and skip out of the way. I had leapt into the air, and smashed most of her returns at the volley. Usually I was a poor, erratic player. Today, my whirling arms had pulled my shirt-tails completely out of my trousers.

"I promised Mummie I'd feed the ducks for her. Come and help me, boy."

Annabelle said it sleepily, while continuing to stare at the grass. Then she was looking at me, smiling, and her teeth so even and white; and suddenly she was caught up in a wild tom-boy mood. She ruffled my hair. I caught her and we wrestled, she very strong, I not wishing to withstand her. I chased her until she begged for mercy. A gardener appeared, and sedately we walked to the feeding of the ducks. In the harness room, standing under peg No. 3, where her polished gear was hanging, I watched her mixing the feed for the ducklings which called *weep-weep-weep* in yellow strings issuing from or going into three coops wherein anxious hens peered and clucked. I watched her, and nothing spoke. Silence was wise, for she came to me and, as I stood looking on the red-tiled floor, she stood still before me, a strangely subdued Annabelle. She put her hand through my arm. Casually I said, "Do you dampen the feed before giving it to the ducklings?"

"Yes."

"I'll do it—I know where that rusty old tap is," and taking the pail, I went to the tap under the yew-tree round the corner of the coach-house. When I came back Annabelle was standing inside the harness room, and as I was going towards the coops, she said, "Willie, here a minute."

"What do you want? I'm going to feed the ducklings. See how hungry they are."

"Here, I haven't mixed it right."

"Oh, yes, you have, I watched your mother doing it many times. If you don't feed these sweet little creatures regularly, they won't be so nice when you get your powerful teeth into them."

"Come here, I want to tell you something. Oh, very well, go and be damned to you."

Carefully I fed the ducklings, feeling a wild elation when

Annabelle came and stood abstractedly beside me. "Help me wash out the bowl, Willie."

"I'll do it, don't you bother. You mustn't get your beautiful white frock spoiled," and I ran off, pretending to be anxious to help all I could. Round the corner, out of sight by the tap, I hopped, and cracked my fingers, telling myself out loud that it was the stuff to give the troops. Then a sad stillness came upon me, for Annabelle's love, if it was love, and surely, surely she was now love itself, had come too late.

Back on the grass again, we played another sett, another wild and merry game of tennis. Sophy and the General had gone to London for the day. It was sweet to sit again on the lawn, Annabelle in her white tennis frock, to see her lustrous dark hair uncoiling softly, rich with life, as my fingers took off the ribbons and pulled apart the plaits. Annabelle shook her head, and then she was looking at me, Beauty itself in her face and eyes. With pain in my breast I thought of Blake's poem

*Never seek to tell thy love
Love that never told can be,
For the gentle wind doth move,
Silently, invisibly.*

and bowed my head before Annabelle's love, beside the daisy quivering and glowing with brilliant life, while my eyes filled with tears for the inexpressible sweetness of life.

"Willie!"

I dared not look at Annabelle, so strangely and softly had my name floated on the air to me. She moved beside me, and I could see the quick movement of breathing in her throat and breast. I touched the daisy.

"You seem to prefer it to me," said Annabelle, very softly.

"Ah, it is so happy, Annabelle. It is you—it is me."

"Pick it for me!"

I shook my head, not daring to look at her.

"Then I'll pull the damned thing off its roots." She spoke in the same soft voice. She did not move. Her hand touched mine. Her fingers took my hand. A kingfisher flashed by, crying a sharp note. *Annabelle*, I cried voicelessly, *it is too late, there has been too much suffering, Annabelle, I had to stop it.* I got up, saying I must try and find the kingfisher's nest in the steep bank at the edge of the

mere, whither in straight blue line the bird had flown. Willie, here, said Annabelle, sitting on the grass beside the daisy. What? I went back to her. I want you to talk to me. Oh no, I'll only bore you. You won't, Willie. Come here.

I walked away, sad with a piercing joy. The sad gestures of love! By the lake the ripples burned with broken sun-reflections. Through lashes of eyes nearly closed they were swans flying there, phoenix-swans fighting beyond the ultimate song and glory of life. Poetry was the ultimate triumph of life over death, the ultimate justification for life. I looked back: Annabelle was walking slowly towards the terrace of the house.

By the lake it was calm and I lay in the sun while the shadow of the weeping willow tree shifted and lengthened on the grass. Moorhens croaked, and paddled in the wavelets; swallows flew low in the late afternoon, dipping and hovering over the water.

The black Daimler limousine glided with tyres crackling on the gravel drive, and slowed up at the stone entrance porch, with its key-stone ensculped in the head of a wolf, its tongue pierced by an arrow, crest of a defeated family whose home had been bought by the rich city merchant who had been Sophy's father.

"Hullo, enjoyed yourself?" asked Sophy, getting out of the car. She did not look at me. The General went into the house, after a wave of the hand, and a "Hullo, had some tennis?" The chauffeur drove the car round to the garage.

"Yes, it's been a lovely day."

"Where's Annabelle?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her for three hours or more. Have you had a good day?"

"Yes, thanks. I've bought the tickets for the Easter trip to the Pyrenees. Have you been doing any writing?"

"Oh, are you going to the Pyrenees?" I felt a pang that I was left out. "Yes, I've done some work, of sorts."

"Yes, we're going there for Easter, before leaving Annabelle at her finishing school in Paris. The Talbots are coming—young Brian Talbot is her beau, you know."

The arrow flew out of the stone, piercing my tongue.

Annabelle was silent, abstract, during dinner, and afterwards

she scarcely spoke. I, too, was silent, searching for and reading Tennyson's songs in *The Princess*. "You're tired, dear, go to bed," said Sophy. Annabelle's sight was unfixed.

"Oh, I left my tennis racquet on the lawn," said Annabelle.

"I'll go and get it for you," said I.

"I'll go," said Annabelle. "It's rather hot in here."

"You shouldn't go out, dear."

"I'll get a coat, Mother."

Annabelle went to get a coat, and I opened the french windows for her and walked with her across the terrace, in the clear starlit night. I felt clear and serene as the night: I had made up my mind to say I would leave tomorrow and never return. I would henceforth live only for my work. I was determined to leave early in the morning, and never return. A shooting star fell, a bluish-white streak.

*Now slides the silent meteor on and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.*

Yes, I would leave before sunrise. I had my Norton, having returned to Devon for a couple of days, to see that Billjohn and Pie were all right, and also to fetch the manuscript of my fantasy of the spirits of earth, water, and air. I knew the true ending now.

The pallor of Annabelle's gown under her coat showed in the darkness. My tongue was transfixed. Annabelle put her arm in mine, and we walked to the lake unspeaking.

We walked back again.

"Don't go in there, come in the other way, I must talk to you," said Annabelle.

"No, this way."

"No, come."

Annabelle pulled me away from the french windows. We entered under the wolf's head, through the heavy oak-and-iron door. A light burned in the lobby.

"Your racquet strings are damp. I'll run up and get a towel."

"Willie."

I scarcely knew what I was doing. I put the racquet down on a chest. Our arms hung at our sides. Her fingers touched mine, held them lightly, she leaned to me, her face like a sleep-walker's, we kissed, my arms were round Annabelle, and her arms round me and our lips sought each other like two anemones in a rock-

pool. Oh, Annabelle, do you——; and Yes, breathed Annabelle. Don't tell anyone, will you, and with eyes averted, she breathed goodnight and ran upstairs, leaving me standing in the hall. I went outside again, and walked by the star-glinting lake. Then returning to my room, I sat down and made notes rapidly for the final scene of the fantasy. The notes drew out, and became the narrative.

When I got up from the table I was cold. The house was silent with the silence of the ultimate light-years of creation. My room adjoined Annabelle's. I wrote a note to Sophy, thanking her for all she had done for me, saying I had to go away, and I would write to her later about my things. Then I wrote a note to Annabelle, with a quotation from Lovelace's poem to Lucasta, slipped it under her door; hesitated; opened the door softly and withdrew the note; tip-toe'd downstairs with my bag, let myself out into the darkness. It was chilly, and I ran and walked round the lake until the east became steely, and then to the coach-house, wheeled out the Norton, walked it past the house and down the drive, and away to the Gravesend ferry and the Thames estuary gleaming with sunrise.

Part III

BARLEYBRIGHT

*'As the innocent moon, that nothing does but shine,
Moves all the labouring surges of the world.'*

From *Sister Songs*, by FRANCIS THOMPSON

27

THE little nature sketches I had written intermittently for Arthur Beverley Baxter, the kindly Canadian literary editor of one of the popular London daily papers, made me acquainted with two friends who were on the staff. One of them, called Bevan by his friends, was a wit whose daily column of humour, fun, and satire was much admired. His friend, Johnny, was a pastoral poet and writer of country essays. Johnny was a fanatical admirer of an older writer of large and varied talent, Hilaire Belloc.

Johnny appeared in Fleet Street dressed for the rabelaisian countryside of his imagination, in large laced trench-boots, heavy oversize breeches, a thick staff, and a stage-rustic's hat which he had scrumpled and torn to give it an atmosphere. He roared songs in ale-houses during the week-ends, he walked all night, was often an aggressive monologist, and a violent acclaimer of the Faith. He was Sussex by adoption through the books of Mr. Hilaire Belloc. He argued with and shouted at nearly all his friends, who always spoke of him behind his back with affection. Johnny was a short man, strongly built, who at one time or another tired and exhausted all those numerous friends; but those friends, though often exasperated by his argumentativeness, respected him not for his assumed mediaeval ideas and the Faith which he declaimed, but for his faith in something beyond formulation, for which he struggled, and which can unexceptionably be expressed as the impersonal. And they read all that he wrote, for, like his friend Bevan, Johnny as a writer was a wit of the first class.

Two nights after leaving Essex I took my cousin Arthur to

a party given by Bevan, with whom I was acquainted, and his wife Jane in St. John's Wood. It was one of those parties which by their intimacy and friendliness one remembers long. A large studio was attached to the house, and there we sat, lounged, talked, ate, smoked, and were happy. Jane sang songs of Rimsky-Korsakoff; then her brother and Bevan, an amateur pianist, sat at the piano and struck notes which made me instantly alert. The music was clear light. They told me it was by César Franck. More bottles were opened. Johnny was talking about the Pyrenees. Immediately I was alert. He said he was going to the Pyrenees for Easter. His usual loud declamatory voice was now soft and natural.

At the word *Pyrenees* my heart grew heavy, losing the uprising clear happiness which had come upon me when the Franck music had been played. The celestial or poetic world was beyond all heart-ache. Was it mere sublimation of the sexual instinct, as the founder of the Tomorrow Club had insisted? My mind returned from its twisted feelings to realise that Johnny and Bevan and another friend were going to the Pyrenees at Easter. And with a poignant hope, that if I went with them I might see Anna-belle again, I dared to think of asking if I might accompany them.

But perhaps Johnny and Bevan would not want me? They were talking about the great walk Belloc had described in one of his books, and were planning to follow in the master's footsteps. "We shall sleep on glaciers!" cried Johnny. "We shall hear Roland's ghostly horn in the Pass of Roncesvalles! We shall stand under torrents, and watch sunrise on the peaks of the eagles! We will drink deep draughts of Bordeaux, and pour bottle after bottle of the rare Igharra, which is distilled in only one small valley, down our throats of leather, singing songs which will start the thunder of avalanches! Igharra! Drink of heroes!" He flung the swipes of his glass of pale ale violently into the fire. "Pah! Chemical poison! Filth of little human hogs with timid eyes and long furry ears, who whinny with excitement and cry Progress! because gasometers are now to be admitted to the League of Nations, and field mice fitted with little oilskin hats under the Education Acts!"

This was the Johnny they loved; before he tired himself out with his own exuberance. Demands were made on him.

"Sing, Johnny! Come on, give us 'And I ride, and I ride'."

Johnny then sang at the top of his voice a song which may have been written by Belloc, or by Johnny himself, and was very fine indeed. He shouted, he bawled, he hurt his vocal chords; but he put the song over. Afterwards I ventured to ask Johnny if I might go with them to the Pyrenees. "Yes, boy!" cried Johnny, in the friendliest tones. So it was decided. He warned me of the ardours of mountaineering; declaring that we might have to sleep in ice and snow, and on glaciers. My imagination added wolves, bears, and bandits; and I said that in the morning I would go to Cook's in Ludgate Circus and buy the tickets.

That night my cousin Arthur, who had been silent and admiring of the artistic world of which he had the fortunate entrée, and I slept in the big studio with Johnny and Jane's brother, on various couches, which Jane prepared for us.

After a merry breakfast we all set out for Fleet Street. Johnny walked ahead, singing lustily, and whirling his staff. We took a taxicab. We went down Regent Street, slowly, while Johnny looked out of the window. Suddenly, surprise and delight came over his face as he stared at a strange man, and then raising his soiled hat, he half got up and bowed. He continued doing that all the way down Regent Street, and the expressions on the faces of the men on the pavements were amusing. One man must have seen the hat trick before, because his face set instantly in a ferocious scowl, the points of his canine teeth showed under his moustache, and he started running after our taxicab. Leaning out of the window, Johnny beckoned him on violently, while Bevan told the driver to go faster. When the fellow had turned back, Johnny stopped the taxi by a red pillar box on a street corner; and stooping down beside it, his ear pressed to the side, pretended to be listening intently. Soon several people were standing and staring at the pillar box. Johnny listened the more intently. Others listened, too. A crowd collected. Johnny then moved away, and got back into our taxi. We drove off as a policeman, holding up the traffic, walked across the road to where various puzzled people were listening and peering into the letter slits.

I got my tickets, stayed a couple of days with cousin Arthur—playing tennis, walking, and dancing, but always Annabelle in my thoughts—and returned to Devon on my Norton. The journey on the grey road past Stonehenge was now monotonous. My dog and cat greeted me as before, and within five minutes of opening the cottage door the old cattle dog was in and out with a pound of sausages, in his jaws, stolen from off my table, pursued by the furious but incompetent Bill-john. That night I started another rewriting of the third book of the tetralogy, but the ticking of the death-watch beetles was insistent; and feeling that Johnny would approve the gesture, I fired both barrels of my gun at the unseen insect. Then I went to bed, and lay unsleeping, listening to the owls, but thinking of my mother, of Annabelle, of human hope and dream, of the Pyrenees, the glaciers we would cross, and if I ought to have spikes put in my boots, and take an ice-pick in my old army pack.

I wrote a letter to Irene at the address she had given me, stuck on a 2½d. stamp, and posted it. I said I was going to the Pyrenees for Easter, but doubted if I should be anywhere near civilisation, as I was going in a party with some very tough fellows, who were used to mountaineering, and sleeping on glaciers.

Three days before Good Friday I asked for my weekly bill for board and washing at the postman's cottage. This was given me with a pair of breeches that had been washed specially for the adventure. The breeches were of light cotton cloth, and a good Conduit Street cut and fit; they had been made in the autumn of 1918, when I had been ordered to India, but had been stopped owing to the Armistice. They were good breeches, with knee-buttons correct in place to within a thirty-second of an inch, and the best buckskin strappings. I had asked the postman's wife to wash them. She had *boiled* them; and giving them to me, neatly folded, she exclaimed, before I had opened my mouth, "I know what you be looking at, but 'tidden no good you saying naught! 'Tes what you asked me to do! You said I must boil'm, so I boiled'm! And there you be, you see, 'tes no good you saying naught about it! I've done my best vor 'ee always! You axed me to boil'm in the furnace, and so you see

it be no good you telling me they'm all zamzawed, because I knows they'm all zamzawed, see?"

The buckskin strappings certainly were zamzawed. But before I could say a word, the postman broke in, bobbing his carrotty head before me, "I'm sure my wife's always been very kind to 'ee, always very kind to 'ee, my wife hath always done her best to plaize 'ee, plaize 'ee, my wife hath!"

I was about to agree with this, but had scarcely indrawn my breath to speak, when the daughter cried, in her ringing choir-voice of treble, "'Tis no use you saying anything, Mr. 'Wisson', us knows all about you, and where you've been, and what you've been doing, so don't you say anything! Proper mazed you be!" She laughed. Without a word I looked at the bill. By a simple error in rural arithmetic a week had been reckoned as eight days. I knew my homely friends were scrupulously honest and particular: it was merely a slip in calculation.

My breeches were ruined: the strappings were shrivelled, hard, and ugly. The good woman insisted that I had asked her to boil them. Was she sure I hadn't asked her to fry them, I suggested. And while ordinary mortals were given seven days in every week, why was I given eight? But it was better to deal with a man; so after my plateful of Beef and Bisto, I went to the postman, who was digging a grave in the churchyard, and made a man-to-man appeal on this question. Are there eight days in a week, or are there seven? Would he just answer that chronological query? Perhaps he thought I was swearing; for with Christian humility he said, while tapping the thigh-bone of a previous tenant of the grave upon the handle of his shovel:

"My wife hath been very kind to 'ee, zur, very kind my wife hath been, always done her best for 'ee, Mr. Wisson, I'm sure my wife hath."

"Your wife hath, I know," I replied. "But just look at this piece of paper. I pay weekly. There are seven days in a week. I paid a week ago. Since then another week has gone by——"

"Us have always looked after 'ee proper, us don't mind what us does for 'ee, us'll do aught for 'ee, Mis'r Wisson, and for old Biell, too, dear old Biell, us does all us can for both of 'ee, Pie too, Pie, Pie cometh often and my wife doth look after Pie, when you'm gone, gone, when you'm gone like."

"Yes, I know, I agree, I couldn't find nicer or kinder people

anywhere; but just tell me this, Are there seven days in a week, or are there eight, my dear sweet old wimbling fellow."

"I'm sure us does all us can for 'ee, all us can, my wife doth." *Tap tap* of the bone on the handle of the shovel.

"Listen," I said, feeling I was getting into a hopeless fix with him, and struggling to make it clear. "Listen, my dear old fellow. Do you not understand that a man may care for truth for its own sake? That while Paul preached Faith, Hope and Charity, the superior wits of Jesus indicated Faith, Hope and Clarity—and the greatest of these is clarity? For if all men shed their conceits and taught themselves clarity there would be no need of the lesser and compromising virtue of charity. The village thinks I am mazed—but the village lives in a world actuated by suspicion, mental fear, distrust of self and therefore of neighbour. The more fearful are often the more religious: and the religion taught in the school and preached in the church—is taught in ignorance of the essential clarity."

"I'm sure my wife hath always bin very kind to 'ee, very kind my wife hath bin, my wife," murmured the gravedigger.

I emended the bill to seven days, and with the money left it, under a saucer, on the kitchen table.

At supper that night both daughter and mother blamed me for the underhand way I had emended the bill in pencil, instead of having the *honesty* to speak openly to them about it. My lips parted, but both women told me not to dare to say anything further. "Proper old praicher you be!" cried the daughter. "Us heard all about 'ee praiching to feyther in the grave 'a was digging!"

"Yes," I said, "I was quite wrong. I asked you to roast, boil and fry my breeches; and there are eight days in a week." Within a few minutes we were all laughing together, and in the excitement Billjohn stole the postman's cat's supper.

29

Thursday morning I stood on Victoria Station, feeling suitably prepared to cross mountains. Thick nailed shooting boots, leather anklets, thick stockings, tweed plus fours, tweed coat, and cap. In my pack, besides sleeping and toilet things, were a thick sweater and heavy Exmoor hunt coat

which was made of several layers of cotton and rubber and when worn reached between knee and ankle. This would give some protection from the snow and ice on which, according to Johnny, we might have to sleep.

Bevan turned up with the fourth man of our party, ten minutes before the train pulled out. To my surprise they were dressed in ordinary lounge suits, and thin-soled town shoes. Bevan had no luggage except a toothbrush; the other man, who was Johnny's cousin, carried a small knapsack, slightly filled. Johnny had already gone on, and would meet us at the Spanish frontier the next morning.

It was a placid crossing, and we drank bottled beer while the sun shone outside. From Boulogne we saw dykes and polders; corn fields; and weed-grown spaces, wide and level in the chalk—sidings where once dumps of shells and wounded men and bales of wire and boxes of boots and plum-and-apple jam had stood. Seeing the sites of old encampments, it was as though part of me were striving to create again the old scenes and faces. I have never finally understood this feeling for the past; but I do know that, without it, I should never have written a book.

Our train jolted and jerked around Paris, from the Gare du Nord to the Gare du Midi, in the darkness. I felt elated that this was Paris, the city of attractive naughtiness and lights and laughter: the houses and roofs of the suburbs might have been of Clapham Junction or Vauxhall, but it was Paris. And the great Arnold Bennett was on our train, going down into Spain; paying his expenses by writing articles for *The Daily Express*, which had advertised widely their imminent appearance. After some delays we were off in earnest, and thinking about dinner. Of course we had a bottle of wine, and then another bottle, and after that café, cognac, and cigars. My boots and woollen pants under my breeches were a bit hot, but when we got to the glaciers, and slept on the ice . . . that night I slept on the floor, selecting that place as two girls were in our second-class compartment, and I gave up my corner seat to one of them, apparently in chivalrous mood, but actually because it was anyway inevitable, and choosing the floor first, I would be able to lie stretched out, and at ease; while others dozed fitfully, their backbones bent. I awoke a score of times, I was soon used to

the noise of wheels directly under my ear; and no one trod on me, as I knew they would not.

At last we were slowing up at Bayonne, and there on the platform, as we opened the window and breathed the chill air of a railway station dawn, stood Johnny, several days unshaven, an old handkerchief knotted round his neck, and looking like one of the smaller peasants in an Old Vic production of *Cavalleria Rusticana*. He said he had walked all through the night, the day before, and the previous night.

After debate, argument, and raucous shouting, we took a taxi to a white and gold hotel in the town and drank coffee and ate rolls. Then we discovered that the train we should have taken to Pamplona in Spain was the train from which we had alighted. The only other train that day was a local. After further argument we decided to take it.

I remember the long wait at Hendaye in the sun of Spain, ourselves lying hour after hour on the platform; the customs officers with cloaks and carbines and queer flat tarpaulin hats; the crude and filthy vault of a lavatory; lunch in the railway buffet; Johnny's conversation in Spanish with the waiter—his knowledge of the language being apparently the use of two words, *quando tiempo?* for when the train might leave for Pamplona; a parcel made of my heavy hunt coat and posted to England; and a walk in the town, with sights of pasty-faced Spanish girls in shawls; swallows already nesting under the wide eaves of houses; a white-faced mother suckling her infant while selling oranges in a fruit shop; the general quiescence and apathy of the place, the feeling of poverty and lack of hope or endeavour: decadent Spain, neither old nor new, but stagnant. In the afternoon we got into a train whose mediaeval appearance and ancient slowness seemed to displease the verbal admirer of mediaevalism and old leisure. But this was a superficial concept, for the old grandeur and vitality of Spain was gone; and only sloth was in its place. At one station our narrow wooden carriage and indeed the entire train was besieged by hundreds of white-faced women and girls in black clothes and shawls. With them entered some of the customs officers, or soldiers, wearing capes and those curious hats reminding me of insect water-boatmen. We had been going a few minutes when a fusillade of shots sounded; people began shouting; the train shuddered to a standstill. We thought of ban-

dits, and I suggested that they were after Bevan, the famous journalist and wit, of the *Daily* ——. "Hush," pleaded Bevan, incipient agony on his face. I had callously betrayed his identity to the two English girls in the Paris train, and Bevan had withdrawn thereafter into wordlessness. However, we weren't to be taken for ransom; nor was the revolution started; a drunk man had fallen out of the train, and the fusilade was apparently part of the railway signalling system.

Our carriage emptied again, and we had it to ourselves. I felt I was really seeing life as I tore a long fish-shaped loaf with my hands and teeth, while holding a black uncorked bottle of raw red wine between my knees. The train puffed slowly, weakly, up gradients between rocky wooded hills, and the sky held the hues of sunset. The journey went on, and on. We sat in twilight, we dozed, we looked out of the windows, we talked about the dinner we should eat in Pamplona. Johnny objected to nearly everything said, was told to shut up, and continued as before. I imagined that his dream of Spain, fed on Belloc, was so different from reality; and of course he needed to sleep. So did we all; so we shut ourselves away from his explosive derision.

At last Pamplona. Arguments about where we should go. Johnny scoffed at the idea of eating in an hotel. "Why didn't you stay in London if you wanted the Carlton or the Ritz?" I only wanted a wash and food. We went into the railway restaurant. It was closed. A guide took us up a dark street to the town's centre, and there left us. All was strangely dark. People passed like wingless bats. In the distance a torchlight procession moved. The murmuring black-dressed crowd moved nearer, bearing on a platform or litter a corpse, bloodstained, illuminated by scores of agitated candle-flames. I remembered it was Good Friday, and this was a waxen effigy of Jesus immediately after criminal execution for blasphemy. When it had passed, we found the square, which was also in darkness, except for the lighted windows of one restaurant. We entered, to the protests of Johnny. With his three days beard, tangled hair, neckerchief, dusty shoes, and grease-stained breeches, Johnny created a mild stir among the diners. Seated at the table, Johnny took one sip of the soup, and dashed the spoon into the plate.

"Utter filth!" he shouted. "Out of a can, of course. How long are you fellows going to remain in this accursed hole?"

"Shut up, Johnny! You're an unbearable bore."

"Of course I'm a bore! You nimminy-pimminy little hogs, why didn't you go on a Cook's Tour with sun-glasses and sterilised paper handkerchiefs?"

Another dish came, a mess of grey stringy stuff. He gazed in violent horror. "Poison!" he roared. "Trash! The guts of goats slopped down before me. Bloody beastliness, unutterable, unspeakable loathesomeness! Look at it! A glutinous glomeration of the guts of goats! Is this a Christian meal? Was this once the Holy Roman Empire? Am I to continue sitting here and watching you absorb that abominable frapponbulière?"

"D-d-don't behave like a b-b-bloody little n-n-n-nincompoop," stuttered Bevan. "Other p-p-people here can hear you!"

"Let them hear me!" yelled Johnny. "I wish they understood English, they don't unfortunately, being a gang of belly-cramming dagos. Look at their pale and beastly faces!" He swung his arm. "Degenerates! Modernity! Pah!" More food came. "What's this poison, this fungus, this filth?" He shoved back his chair, seized pack and staff, and went out of the room. We tried to eat our food, which certainly tasted horrid, in silence. "B-b-bloody little f-f-fop!" stuttered Bevan. "He's quite m-m-mad, of course. A m-m-mad wart-hog of a f-f-fellow."

As we were going out, we heard an English voice from the next table. Then another English voice. We learned that the pale-faced diners were all English people, on an Easter Cook's Tour; and that the dish rejected by Johnny was stewed celery, possibly imported from England for the tourists.

Johnny was outside. To my amazement, there was to be no sleep that night. Raspingly Johnny declared we must walk: only degenerates slept in hotels. It was a night of full moon. His voice became happier as he spoke of Roncesvalles, lying between the mountains to the north. It lay twelve hours walk away. Bevan proposed a motor ride to the top of the pass. I hitched up my pack, and felt the bite of my nailed boots on the dusty road. By all means I would walk through the night. But Bevan and the fourth man, called Guy, were for motoring to the highest point, and then walking down into France, reaching St. Jean Pied-de-Port for breakfast. "Breakfast!" cried Johnny, "only the beastly bourgeois have breakfast. What fast are you gluttons going to break, may I ask?" We hired a car.

The driver had been in taverns that night. He drove off with a jerk and scream of gears. We were thrown against one another. We began to laugh, and then to sing. We banged on the glass, and Johnny yelled for the driver to go slower. The driver waved his hand, yelled *Pronto!* and the car went faster. Uphill now, and the second gear threatening to rip out of its metal box. We were thrown against first one door, then another door, as we skidded round corners. Deciding it would be wiser to leave a drunken driver alone, we sat silent except for ejaculations when it seemed inevitable that the car must plunge over the curving lip of first one precipice, then another. White and round was the moon: deep and dark the wooded valleys and gorges below.

Just after midnight we were standing on the crest of the pass, with the noise of the Hispano-Suiza engine receding into Spain, and the valley where Roland, "the temples of his brains broken", blew his horn for help that never came. Johnny and Bevan stood side by side, endeavouring to feel as they imagined they would feel when at last they stood side by side above heroic Roncesvalles. Guy, another literary aspirant, admirer and disciple of Leonard Merrick, stood appropriately a little apart from them, and silent. From far below floated in moonshine the sound of torrents and swift waters. It was cold standing still. Our shadows slanted short on the white road. We started our walk.

It was unreal. We walked in the white and timeless night. We did not speak; each man walked with his own thoughts. Trees were tall and gloomy beside the road. In my ignorance I set out to descend a hairpin bend direct, and nearly fell into a ravine. Hastily I climbed up again, and followed the others. Alas, the spectral silence did not last. There were arguments, there were shouts. Apparently a mild remark about something or other had induced a harangue. "Why in heaven's name didn't you bring your Rolls-Royces, your white spats, and your loathsome silk hats with you? Why did you come if you didn't intend to walk like ordinary, normal, natural men? Your little pots of caviare and foiegras, oh, what will you do without them? And who will bring you your electrically-sterilised and hermetically-sealed platinum pot of hot shaving water at eleven o'clock in the morning, as you snore and wallow in your silken pyjamas and oil-painted bedding?"

"Shut up, you g-g-grotesque little c-c-c-coxcomb, you p-p-p-preposterous fribble!"

"Chuck it, Johnny. It's not amusing after the first twelve hours."

Johnny walked by himself. It was his third night without sleep. We, too, were irritable-weary, but kept our silence. I was glad to empty myself of thoughts of Annabelle and the eternal mental war between human light and darkness.

Between three and four o'clock I suggested we should go into the woods which stretched above the ever-down-winding road, make a wood fire, and sleep round it until sunrise. Surprisingly the mediaevalists spoke of trespass, policemen, and other civilised objections. I thought of the blessing of sleep, blessed sleep. It was the sensible, or natural, thing to do. Wolves were probably extinct, but the wild boar and the little bear still lived in the forests; let them lift their snouts to flair our smoke. I urged the delights of warmth, of sleep in the moonlit, torrent-haunted night. It was too risky, decided the admirers of *Chanson de Roland*. I said no more, but I was disappointed; for many a time I had drowsed away the night beside a fire on headland and moorland tracts. A holiday without sleep was like a plant without a root.

We passed by a wooden shack where slovenly Spanish soldiers slept, guarded by a sentry with curious musket, broken boots, and creased uniform. The guard turned out, yawning and scratching, and for ten minutes our passports were peered at by the tallowlight of a lanthorn, while slow and incomprehensible questions were asked out of suspicious tallowy faces. At last we were allowed to go on down the endless road.

And we came to the mist, a tenuous vapour of torrents and declining moonlight; and the cry of the waters below was louder, and strangely like the chuckling of devils. Or were they human voices echoing among the trees and the rocks? We were too tired and footsore for the fancy.

The sky was growing grey, the moon a mere shell of light; and the night was over.

Our night was over: but not our walk. We slogged on, Johnny striding chin-out in front; Bevan and Guy walking reflective, bleary-eyed; I following, longing for sleep, and my feet were blistered.

We trailed into St. Jean Pied-de-Port. We hesitated before

slommocking into a small *pension* or hotel which was obviously filled with minor Anglo-Indians on leave or retired from administrative posts in the British *raj*. There was a controversy over methods of eating; one favouring breakfast at a table, after washing and shaving, the other preferring to gulp from a bottle and to tear at a loaf of white bread with the teeth, with no thought of water. So Johnny departed, declaring that he had come to walk, and not to loll about talking anaemically of literary criticism, folk dancing, nature lovery, and artful, crafty movements. Swinging Durendal, his staff, and giving us a "So long, cretins!" over his shoulder, Johnny strode away up the road which lay misty-white in the risen sun.

Feeling some of Johnny's personality upon myself, I stared distastefully at a breakfast plate of undersized trout, scarcely bigger than sardines, which had been netted from the river outside, swelling past its banks with grey-green snow-water from the white and distant peaks seen through the window. Damn the Anglo-Indian murmuration, their blank covert glances of inspection upon our boots, coats, and faces.

That day we three lounged about the village. Bevan wore the beret he had bought at Hendaye like a native Basque. We drank many *bocks*, sitting outside various little *estaminets*. Espalier trees were thick with sap, knotted with Samson-muscles, about to burst their buds for the sun's power and life. Two of the nails in my boots, which had given me blisters, were removed at the shoe-maker's shop, and the holes plugged with wooden pegs. We wondered what Johnny was doing, missing him; and that night we slept, each in a small room, luxuriously in cool clean sheets.

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Right and powerful overhead was the sun as we walked along the white roads under the enormous incult foothills of the Pyrenees. I think we were a happy trio. We drank wine and ate bread and cheese in the midday *estaminets*, thankfully sitting on stool and bench, sweat-soaked and burnt of face and hand. I swam in a river, while Bevan and Guy lounged on the banks above the snow-water swirling grey-green

under alder and ash. We stayed at night in hotels almost empty, for ten, and sometimes five, francs a room, and food equally cheap—and one hundred and twenty francs to the pound in that year. We drank *bocks* in one another's bedrooms, talked and laughed in freedom, slept sound and awoke to the lowing of cows in the market place. We laughed as we encountered everywhere large hoarding advertisements of Izarra, that liqueur which Johnny had declared to be made only in one small secret mountain inn. The heavy snow-water of the Oloron drove against the stone piers of the bridge we crossed, and Atlantic salmon leapt in the great eddies. We watched Basques playing pelota, a sort of long-distance fives played up against a wall with a long-bouncing ball. We had fun with a native sponger who advised us to drink a wonderful drink which turned out to be aniseed and liquorice in hot water—admirable for mules suffering from colic, said Bevan—and we invited him to lunch. He smilingly acknowledged our insults delivered in the rawest, bawdiest English as though they were the floweriest compliments between dud Allied generals during the War. After the fourth day we felt fine and taut, eager after breakfast to set out into strong sunshine for our walk of thirty to forty kilometres. Sometimes we rode in steam-trams, with bottles of red wine costing 2 francs, sticking out of our pockets. Once we sat opposite a child whose face I stared at, it was lovely brown-eyed innocence, and my being surged as I imagined such a child coming from love with Annabelle. In broken French I tried to pay the child's mother a compliment, saying, "J'aime bien les filles", and her expression, hitherto most amiable, became austere; even when Bevan hastened to explain that *milord anglais* meant *les jeunes filles*.

My two friends became tired of walking for its own sake; time was short, and soon Bevan must be back in Fleet Street, and he wanted to visit Chartres, that ancient walled town of which he had read and dreamed. As we walked up the valley road to Laruns, it was decided that we should take the train to Chartres on the morrow. I had bought a Michelin motoring map in Arudy, and followed our travels on it during the midday rest at Castet. As we lay beside the river a panic urgency to see Annabelle came into my mind. The "young man" from Melton Mowbray was going to be there. Oh hell, why hadn't I got

Annabelle when I had had the chance? Why allow scruples to ruin my happiness, in a world which generally had few scruples where natural, human impulses were concerned? There was nothing good or bad but thinking made it so: why should a man's so-called conscience, or mental fear, repress his vital instincts, ruin his happiness? All my life I had been hiding my true self away, dreading to hurt other people's feelings with the result that I had hurt myself, and was weak, expecting happiness to be given me from others, not creating it within myself by being true to myself. Supposing I had said, Dearest Sophy, you are sweet to me, and I am fond of you, but I love Annabelle with all my heart. I had been weak, cowering in the Hamlet of self. *Argèlès Gazost*, that was the place! I would go! It was not far from Laruns, where we were now walking.

Studying my Michelin map, I reckoned that the distance to Argèlès Gazost was about fifty kilometres from Laruns. Fifty kilometres, thirty miles, all rising to about six thousand feet, zigzagging about, then down again,—hard swift going if it were to be done in a day. Laruns? Wasn't that where Irene lived? Or was I mistaken? I took out my pocket book, and yes, there it was, *Maison Foudroyant, Laruns, Hautes Pyrénées*.

31

WE reached the town, and got rooms for the night. While Bevan and Guy were upstairs, I showed the written address to the patron, in the room below where I was sitting, drinking a *bock*. He studied it, then after cogitation and fingertip touching of lips, his face suddenly became animated, and he pointed through the wooden panelling. To the open door, and he pointed out a blue and white house on the hillside. There madame and mademoiselle lived, Ma'm-selle Bar-lee, la Reine de Carnival!

As I was crossing the square I noticed a woman walking in front of me, with black beret on her head, and a mass of fair curls on the shoulders of her grey tweed coat: familiar figure! I walked faster, my nailed boots slipping on the sett-stoned street, and the iron tip of my staff tapping at every double step. She turned round, stood still, and looked at me and said,

"I thought it was you, before I stopped. I recognised your footfalls!"

I was astonished. "I thought it was Irene, with her hair grown thicker somehow! Gosh, you've changed! You're a young woman, or should I say young lady?"

"Just Barley. When did you come?"

Her face, which had gone pink when we first met, was now pale. I thought how deeply blue, almost cobalt, were her eyes. She was as tall as Irene, yet somehow she seemed so much more mature. Irene was appealing, rather helpless; but this grown-up girl was self-contained. As we walked to the villa on the hillside, I noticed how light on her feet she was, how we walked in step, how quick she was and yet not nervously eager, as I knew I was in so many things. It seemed natural that I should take her arm in mine.

"Barley, I can't quite believe I am here! You were so small a girl, now you are fully fledged. Weren't you Queen of the Carnival?"

"Someone had to be! The Ski Club has a carnival every year. You ought to come next Christmas. It's fun!" We walked on lightly. "Mummie will be surprised, though we have been expecting you! She showed me your letter. Did you come with your friends?"

I told her my two friends were at the inn, and on the morrow they were going to Chartres, while I was walking over the mountains to Argélès Gazost.

"But you can't! That's by the Col d'Aubisque. It's closed until July."

"Oh, I'll get there."

"You can't get there. You must not try. The snow is melting. The Corniche is blocked. It's a narrow track above fearful precipices, and cut through tunnels in the face of the rock. The road has to be cleared every midsummer. I'll take you up and show you as far as La Gourette, if you like. But no farther. It's beautiful there now, the gentians are coming out.

"Look," she said, with wrinkled forehead, when I did not speak, "your two friends are going to Chartres. You can stay with us a day or two, and then go to Argélès by train. Or I'll walk there with you, by road, if you like, I know the way."

She gave me a quick glance, and went on, "I thought only

this morning that you would be here today. Mummie will be so glad to see you."

We walked up the lane, and entered the gate of the blue and white house.

"You ought to come and live here," she said. "Do you ski? I'll teach you! Bring Billjohn and Pie, and the Norton, and stay with us! Hullo, Mummie, look who I've found!"

"Darling!" cried Irene. "How lovely! So you've come at last, H.W.! How well you look! You're just in time for tea."

We sat down and I told them of our walk.

Irene said, "There's a room for you tonight, if you like, and whenever you like. Of course you must stay now you're here, mustn't he, darling? We can't bear to think of him alone in that dark old cottage, can we?"

I sat before a wide window, with a view of the peaks, and listened to Dvorak's *New World Symphony* on the gramophone. Barley sat beside me, very still, arms folded, feet stuck out. After the music, Irene said, coming to sit on the other side of me, "You breathe much too quickly, H.W. And too shallowly. Barley and I practise the Mazdaznan deep-breathing, don't we, darling? All harmony depends on how one breathes. But look, he is smiling his sad smile, perhaps I am talking too much?"

I sought for something to say, lest Irene feel hurt, and ascribe my mood to herself; for in truth I was thinking of Annabelle, and how I had set myself to cross to Argélès in the morning, and ask Annabelle to marry me.

"Yes, I feel sure you are right about the breathing. A young cousin of mine, who is an athlete, told me the same thing. We went beagling together, and I tried to breathe regularly and deeply while we ran. I expect my thoughts are too jumbled."

"Have you noticed, H.W., how Barley breathes, always very slowly? I've brought her up like that, to learn to be still, to rest. A *guru* in India was my teacher. What is it, darling, twelve inspirations to the minute?"

"Sometimes eight, Mummie. By my stop-watch."

"I must be nearly thirty."

"I know. I've been listening." She was nice to sit beside. I tried to breathe deeply, but soon thoughts of Annabelle returned, and I felt unclear. From Annabelle to my book seemed a natural sequence of thought.

"How's your book getting on, the fantasy?" said Barley.

"You read my thoughts," I said. After hesitation, I told her I had it with me, in my pack. I wasn't going to leave it anywhere, to be pinched, I said; not that anyone would want to pinch anything like that, but things were pinched. I took the pages of manuscript out of the pack, and Barley put them on her lap and I read beside her, while the prose seemed to have acquired a firmness it had lacked before.

The Water-Spirit drifted in the stream as far as the foot-bridge by the mossy ruined mill, and rose out of the water before them. Mamis could see only the moon shaken on the waters.

"Farewell, O Star-born, if it be farewell," said the Water-Spirit, his weed-wraith hair waving in the foggy dew. "Thou hast done well, for already several children, taught by thee, come to peer into my streams, thinking how bright is the sun in the water. Wheresoever thou goest, even to beyond the light of the last star, my thoughts will follow thee."

So saying, the Water-Spirit sank back into the stream. "O sister, darling maid, never leave me!" cried the Star-born. "With you I am safe, for in the warmth of your breast is all comfort and renewal. What did the words of the Water-Spirit mean? I do not want to be the Star-born!——"

It was the end of the page. "Finished?" said Barley. I nodded. She turned the page, quickly, silently.

"—I want to remain on the earth, to be with you always. Hide me, my sister, I dare not think to beyond the last star! I fear Death!" he groaned, shuddering violently.

Afterwards he was calmer, and seemed to fall into a sleep, while she watched in the darkness of trees, cherishing him.

And the water ran in the darkness, flowing unseen to the blind sea led by the vacant moon. She thought of the earth, a wanderer of the infinite stellar stream of time, moving to its unknown end in twilight. Poor men, poor stars, they strove, and dreamed, and were lost.

Irene crossed the floor, going into a bedroom. The door closed.

The constellation of Orion strode the southern sky, a sign that the northern season of ice and frost would soon come down upon the moor, and hang the icicles in the gorge. O Summer, Summer, whither hast thou fled, she thought, feeling the frost in her breast. In those happy, happy days of the fled summer he had told her of his journeyings through the light-years of space, seeing the star-clusters of the young suns gathered together in their pride and faith to conquer Huquol; and, beyond their nebulous ken, the giant-forms of ancient suns writhing in flaming agony along their lonely orbits as they strove against the irresistible brute-forces of the cosmos. He had told her of the wondrous dewy light of Saturn; of the glowing, coiling, emerald breath of Orion——

“Lovely,” said Barley, with a swift smile at me, and I felt we were one together.

—he had heard the immense tongue of Sirius rolling down through space as he followed the Huntsman of Heaven in pursuit of false star-dwarfs which had turned back to Huquol. And in the darkness of the travail of stars arose the light of Kristos, from everlasting to everlasting.

“Who is Huquol?”

“Darkness—uncreated light—the time-lag—the mass-mind—the devil. This is where the Star-born goes back, after his failure on earth, where his companion has been Wanhope, an outcast spirit, who is Christ. Look, this is where Wanhope is transformed.”

“Come,” said Wanhope, in a strange voice. “Arise and fear not, O my brother.”

The Star-born arose, and stared wonderingly at him. The form and appearance of Wanhope were altering swiftly. The outcast became as a man, with a body of Light around whose shining head a crown of thorns was deeply set. And as the Star-born looked, he saw buds swelling out of the thorns, and from the buds broke white blossoms.

The white flowers of the thorn glowed in the celestial radiance; the frozen trees of the forest ceased to groan; the

water flowed out of the Ice again; a nightingale sang in a hazel brake.

"The next scene brings in Jefferies, van Gogh, Shelley, Byron, Beethoven, Shakespeare, Wagner, and other poets."

In the radiance of the thorn-set brow of the Stranger the Star-born saw approaching a band of friends that caused his heart to beat strangely; a great strength filled his breast. He walked eagerly towards the shades of men. One was tall and bearded, with blue eyes; another, with wild gentleness in his gaze, had lost an ear; another, the hair of whose small eager head was matted with salt water, was talking to a man with a club-foot, who limped, but whose eyes saw straightly. From the brow of another the hair was swept back in disorder, his underlip thrust out, the strength of his eyes were challenging Darkness. The nightingale flew to his shoulder, and the air shook with the bird's passion.

"Beethoven," said Barley. I nodded.

Others followed. They came to where the glow of light quivered and sang within itself, and as they passed through the light they too were of its glow, even as the Stranger.

"Fear not," said the Stranger, to the Star-born whose glance was downcast. "These are thy brothers, O thou who wast even as a little child. Enter thou the company of Strangers."

"Barley, I ought to go to my friends."

"I am your friends," she said. Her hand held mine beside her.

The company of Strangers pressed forward to greet them. Around them gambolled many animals. A dog leapt up at the Stranger, waving its tail with delight.

"What false things were written in my Name," said the Stranger, gently, greeting the animal. "No man remembered thee, O my small brother of the Fur Spirit. Nor thee, O blue bird of the Quill Spirit, crying Svalà! Svalà! in the intolerable glare of the sun that afternoon."

The Morning Star led him by the hand among the Strangers, saying: These thy brothers were born of Light, and lived as men on the earth awhile. That man cut off his ear in anguish, that man was drowned, that man stoned, that man burned, mocked, derided, persecuted,—the Light quivered and sang, and the singing slowly passed away from the earth into the upper air.

32

"I want to read it all," said Barley. "Leave it here, go by train and see those people in Argélès, and come back. Those people are no good for you. They sap you. I see it in your work here." She touched the MS.

I looked at a page. The firmness had gone out of it. It was pretentious. My life seemed suddenly without purpose.

"Well, thank you for your criticism," I said, getting up. "I really ought to be getting back to my friends now."

"No," she said. "Don't go. I must speak to you. Please! It is very important. It's about Annabelle."

"About Annabelle?" I said, while my heart beat thickly.

She nodded. I saw the pulse beating in her neck. "Look," she said, "Sit down beside me." I sat down. She smiled. "I can read your thoughts, you know! I don't have to read what you write, to know you. I am the true you, you see, and I knew it the very first moment I saw you. This writing is not truly you, it is you taking thirty breaths a minute."

"I see, you are an intellectual! You take away human hope, and then you debunk the sublimation of that hope also. You should join the Tomorrow Club." I was only half-serious.

"I don't know what all that means," she replied. "But I do know that this book is not really you, but only your sad experience. It is not right that you should be sad. I don't like it."

"I see. I'll tear it up."

"No, you won't. I meant, I don't like you being sad. Your sadness isn't you. It's only your experience."

"I see."

She turned and looked straightly at me. "Please, don't hide yourself away from me like that. I'll explain about Annabelle.

Mummie has friends in Essex, and they know your friends there. They say Annabelle is very attractive but—well, they do not understand you. You are not yourself with them.”

Irene returned, holding out a kind of album. “No Mummie, please Mummie!”

“Let H.W. see, darling. There’s some of Devon he hasn’t seen.”

I took the album of snapshots. I saw them as flat surfaces. There were the sands, and the rocks where we had had tea. There was my beard; one of the cottage with Pie on the wall, and the Norton leaning against it with a flat back tyre; me on a shaggy pony; Irene going in to bathe; Barley on a rock in Cornwall—I looked at a new and better edition of Barley in a black bathing dress, about to dive, a lovely figure with mass of hair, firm high breasts, small waist, and long smooth legs. I stared at it, knowing that she was watching me intently.

“H’m,” I said.

“H’m,” mimicked Barley.

“And here is the original, sitting beside me.” I stroked her cheek with the back of my hand. “You’re a nice girl, Barley.”

“Mind you don’t forget,” she muttered, through her teeth, as she leaned over to take the album from my hands. “Give me the damned thing!”

“No, it’s nice to look at you.”

She took the book from my lap. She seemed to want to speak. She drew in a slow, deep breath, and sat very still. At last she said,

“Please be my friend.”

“Of course.”

“Please don’t go to Argélès. I’m not just selfish, asking you that. Only I can’t explain.”

I breathed deeply to give myself assurance to say, “Do you understand?”

She nodded at me. She drew in another deep breath. I did not know what to think. I wanted to see the other snapshots.

Barley on skis; in jodhpurs and short jacket, hatless, sitting on a bullock with wide horns—one of the bullocks which in pairs drew heavy-wheeled carts so slowly along the roads, by a beam secured to their horns.

“JOKE!” she cried, covering the photograph with her hand.

"So I perceive. What a varied life you lead, M'amselle Barlee! Sailing, beach picnic parties, motorbike racing, prawning, diving, posing—hullo, here you are again, showing off those nice legs in shorts and jersey——"

"Shut up!" said Barley, placing her two hands over the page. Her bright eyes stared at me.

"Let me see you as Carnival Queen!"

"I refuse!" she grinned. "Even for you!" she added, with a bold glance. She pouted her lips at me, and scowled. The scowl left her face. I stared at her deliberately.

"I can stare you out!" she said, like a child.

"All right, try!"

She looked at me deliberately: her face suddenly composed, her wide-spaced blue eyes unwinking; the mass of pale yellow hair growing beautifully away from the candid brow; the curve of cheek—she was a nice girl, she was a lovely girl—I pulled her to me, and kissed her. Her lips were hard, because she resisted. She turned her face away.

"Not a very pleasant man after all, am I?"

Her face was pale, its beauty gone.

"Be my friend, that's all I ask," she said. "I am *your* friend."

"It's so easy to say, 'I am your friend'," I said, with a feeling of humiliation. "I must go."

"No, you mustn't!" she replied, looking at me steadily. As though it were being twisted out of her, she said, "I can't love you in the ordinary way."

I took the pages of the manuscript and stuffed them anyhow into my pack. Once again I was about to make a fool of myself, by showing my feelings. And it was Annabelle I loved, Annabelle——

"Please listen," said Barley, pale of face. "Mummie will be back in a moment." She spoke in a low, scarcely audible voice. "I will tell you the truth. I love you. I loved you when I first saw you. I'm sixteen now. Wait till I'm eighteen. Then I will love you. I promise. I'll never change. I can't change. Look, Mummie is coming now. She's been making a bed up for you. Please don't go away, *please*." She leaned over, "Henry!" She gave me a rough touch on my cheek with her lips. "I love you truly," she muttered, her face turned away, so that I saw only the mass of fair hair.

Irene came into the room. She did not look at us directly.

"You'll stay and take pot luck with us, won't you?" she said lightly. "We couldn't think of you coming all this way, and not staying with us, could we, darling? Why, you look as though you have seen a ghost, H.W.!"

I said I ought to be with my friends, thinking of the early start in the morning.

"Well, if he must, we mustn't try to persuade H.W., must we, darling?"

"You must come back! Promise?" cried Barley, on her feet and standing before me. Her wide blue eyes held mine. Her back was turned to her mother. "*Please*, dear Henry," she whispered, looking at me. She was radiant. I found that I was smiling at her, while a warm and happy feeling flowed between us.

Irene said, evenly, "Come, H.W., if and when you want to, you'll always be welcome. You funny baby, you," she said, ruffling Barley's hair. "Now what has the Puma Cub been thinking in that so serious head of hers?"

I put an arm round each, feeling that all people, when you knew them truly, were charming. I drew them to me, and kissed each on the cheek, and then again, rubbing my nose in Barley's bright hair and laying my cheek against hers a moment, whispering I would come back, before taking departure to the hotel below. I walked down to the square, while a feeling of clear power seemed to be filling me.

33

At sunset, after a satisfying supper of omelette, followed by steak and chips, and goat's cheese with red wine, Bevan, Guy, and I sauntered across the square of Laruns. I carried my spiked staff. The snow slopes of the Pic de Ger, eight thousand feet above, glowed pink like a celestial carnation. Infinite peace seemed to dwell up there. We stood in shadow. A glint in the pale sky, immensely high, was an eagle soaring above its eyrie.

"The French engineers are the best in the world," murmured Guy, as we gazed up the dark mountain-side, where an iron conduit pipe stretched to infinity and a cluster of tiny lights. The

new water-turbines and dynamos stood at the base of the mountain. I carved my initials on my new staff, which secretly I had christened "Trusty", spilling red wine down its yellow length in the restaurant. Both Barleybright and the *patron* had said it was impossible to cross the mountains at that time. It was the time of avalanches and water streaming from the lower slopes. *Le Corniche*, or road cut in the face of the precipice, was closed until July. No guide would venture to cross to Argèlès till then, even with snow shoes. But I had to go: I had always avoided a direct issue: I had pretended to follow truth, but always I had avoided it. I had said I would go to see Annabelle, and I would go. I had to keep my word to myself; and so find freedom and clarity. A secret satisfaction filled and animated me.

"M-m-mad Englishman," said Bevan.

"Comment, m'sieu?"

"M-m-mad English m-m-milord," stuttered Bevan. "Fou—sot—imbécile."

"Les avalanches, m'sieu——"

"Bon," said I, recklessly, a litre of red wine inside me. I thought of Annabelle reading, months hence, of a humble shepherd crossing himself as he found a skeleton under the last of the summer's snows. But the vision faded, before a steady gaze of blue. I sat down to write a note to Barley; but nothing would come; I felt quietly happy, content; I put the paper and envelope in the manuscript in my pack. Twilight filled the *grand'place* and colour faded from the virgin snowfields high above. I had a strange feeling that I had come nearly to the end of the world—my little world. As we went back, we passed a priest crossing the square; Bevan touched his beret, saying gravely, "Bon soir, mon père." The priest replied gently, and I, too, felt blessed.

34

At four o'clock, in the electric pallor of dawn, I was awakened by knocking on the door, and the voice of the innkeeper. Immediately I got out of bed, and put on my clothes and nailed boots, strapped and hoisted my pack, took my staff, and clattered loudly down the wooden stairs. The others came down, and we sat at breakfast together.

Soon after dawn we set out. Guy and Bevan were walking with me for a few hours, and then returning. A goatskin filled with wine was slung on a green cord over my shoulder. In my 20-lb. pack was wine, bread, butter, cheese, garlic sausage, olives, and half a chicken. I carried my staff "Trusty".

The sun rose bright and hot, the road turning and twisting and always rising among oaks and pines. We walked easily. We passed a cascade, the outer spray of which quivered with sunbows. At a hairpin bend we lay on the grass and rested, for this was the parting place. By climbing directly up the hillside of heather and short rough grass to the road above—we could see the stone wall against the sky—several kilometres of road winding back upon itself would be saved. We shook hands.

"See you in five days at the Lutetia, Montparnasse. Good luck, you c-c-c-crazy young excelsior m-m-merchant, you," stuttered Bevan, with a smile and a wave of the hand.

35

Up I went, feeling this was indeed adventure. Soon the steepness, about seventy degrees, and the burning sun, made a pause necessary. Water was falling noisily everywhere in runnels and little cascades down the mountain-side. Up again, with pounding heart, and heavier thrusts on the five-foot staff. The pressure of the sun was great. Every part of my body was sweating. Guy and Bevan looked small below. Now their features could no longer be discerned, as they waved good-bye and turned back towards Laruns. I climbed up slowly, while my legs began to feel heavy. I could scarcely lift my feet. God, it was frighteningly hot. My heart made two kettle-drums of my ears. I drank water scooped in my hands; this wasn't enough, I was sweating so. It made my tongue and throat raw; but I had to drink. I lay down, and sucked up water every score of plodded steps upwards. I became afraid of falling, and to escape the fear forced my heavy legs to climb. After a timeless period I began to chatter aloud with distress, fearful of a sunstroke. It was now steeper, I would fall, I could not climb higher, I was terribly afraid. I was stuck there. O Christ, why had I come? My handkerchief, wetted and fixed on head and neck, dried swiftly, and

had to be taken off and held in the water again every few minutes. The hair of my head, held under the grey rushing water of a runnel, dried after three minutes in that world of burning blue and blistering sun-pressure, my boots heavy and swinging about as though filled with mercury. The sun cared only for tigers burning bright: a barbaric sun, harsh and cruel, waiting to cleave the skull and pierce with radiant death. A twin fear interlocked my flaring flesh: never could I climb to the top, never could I climb down again. One slip or stumble, and I would slide and roll and hurtle down to the tiny road-ribbon below.

But I must get to the top, and think no more of falling. I drank twenty or more pints of water during that climb to the blue-enamelled rim of sky. My clothes, including jacket and tweed plus-fours, were wringing wet with the sweat of the appalling exertions. Somehow I reached the wall above, clawed myself over the flakes of rock, and lay beside a heap of stones. I felt knotted and writhing painfully within, to escape the light of the sun; and lay there for some time, while my own life clarified with the slowing of heart and breathing. After a further rest, I walked on up the rough and narrow track. It ran with rillels of water, glistening in the sun. About a kilometre onwards it vanished under the edge of the melting snow.

I was alone in a world of white and blue. I sat down, removed my boots, stockings, coat, shirt, and vest. They were heavy as though dipped in water. Near me a small bird like a pipit fluttered into the sky, volplaned down with tail spread up for air-brake, singing as it dived to a rock. I took a pull at my wine-skin, which held three pints. Exaltation came to me, and I started to sing.

When the sun had dried one side of my shirt and vest, I turned them over. I was not hungry, but perhaps it was wise to eat. One sniff of the food made me ravenous. I warned my inner self to eat less quickly, and to chew each mouthful thirty times. Inner self refused and continued to gollop; but I was wise enough to keep some of the food for a reserve in case we lost ourselves in the mountains. We? Yes, we. I did not feel I was I, but we. I was comforted by the sight of the staff of mountain-ash, with its leather hand-thong, set upright in the snow.

There were ten more hours of daylight. Why hurry? I removed my plus-fours, and stood naked in the snow. I had a

snow bath, and ran round in the dazzling whiteness. Then I remembered reading about snow blindness. I closed one eye, keeping the lens of the other for a reserve.

An eagle with ponderous and wheeling flight drifted through the pale sky above me. Was it the eagle I had seen the evening before? It swooped down, falling beyond the line of the snow, to rise again some minutes later. As it flew over me again with slow flaps, I could see the dark markings on the wings which spanned, the *patron* had said, over ten feet. I drew the spiked ash-pole nearer, testing old bayonet-thrusts and parries learned in the War. I had visions of myself fighting an eagle, but the bird soared indifferently over.

Flowers of an intense deep blue, the beautiful mountain gentians, grew on the sward where the snow had melted. All the long winter and spring they had been awaiting the life-giving sun. Feeling that now I knew truly the Jefferies emotion of soul-thought, I knelt down and let their truth of colour enter into my eyes. I breathed deeply, and standing up again, rubbed myself with snow. Hurray! I drank some more water, sucking it up with my mouth in a little pool. I dressed, humped my pack, slung the wine-skin, with its gay red tassel, over my shoulder, and went on.

The snow was so bright that I had to peer through my lashes, with the lids of each eye almost touching. I prodded the snow before each step. It was deep. The staff sank to my wrist at every thrust. After a while it became tedious to test the way like that, so I proceeded at a less cautious pace, which increased to between walking and running, for in this manner my boots would scarcely break the top crust formed by an indecisive thaw hardening again in the late night. If I fell into a crevasse, then I fell. Onwards, as rapidly as possible! I had no compass, but I set my map roughly by the sun, and took a line under the Pic de Ger.

After about half an hour's hopping and plunging across dazzling snowfields, I saw a line of dark dots receding in the distance towards a vast sheer perpendicular wall of mountain. They were stone-heaps, hidden by snow, except their tips. I reckoned they would lie beside the road, for its repair. I followed them. The line of heaps led on towards and into the dark-brown precipice face many thousands of feet high. It was marked Le Corniche

on my map. I went on, until I saw the road was blocked. Glissades of snow and earth and rock had buried slantingly all except the outside edges of the parapet. I regarded it with dismay. To go on meant that I had to pick my way along the parapet. The parapet was made of flakes of rock, set side by side, as in rough Devon walling. They were not held by mortar, or even by earth. Some were loose. Below the parapet was a drop of more than a thousand feet. I did not know what to do; my mind abdicated my body; and somehow I was creeping in hot quivering fear past a break in the parapet, a hundred yards of it behind me, my legs quivering, and the appalling vision of an endless peril stretching in front. While I stood still, desperately afraid, I heard a dull rumbling across the valley, and a shock of terror transfixed my body.

36

The rumbling was made by the multitudinous echoes of a noise increasing above me. Many fragments of ice and rock were spinning and bounding down the brown sheer above, each lump of ice or stone taking great spinning jumps as it preceded the avalanche. Terror made rigid my legs. The void below the parapet on which I stood fixed was a thousand-foot drop. I prayed instinctively. I saw the face of Richard Jefferies, quite near me in the sunshine: the brown beard, the tall brow, meditative blue eyes, all vague and like a child's transfer fixed instantaneously in the air; but what I sensed without *thinking* was the immortal calm everlastingness of existence. I found myself making with my left hand the sign of the cross on my chest. Immediately the terror-flash was unfixed from my limbs. Seeing a tunnel twenty yards away, I moved automatically along the loose parapet towards it, to fall on hands and knees in the shelter, while with a thunderous rolling roar the avalanche came down and carried away the parapet of damp earth-bonded scree which my feet had trod a moment before.

When all was quiet again I listened to the wild cries of two eagles soaring up from the valley, and watched their brown hollow-winged flight cutting into and sweeping through each other's orbit. Up and up they soared, and passed beyond the

shoulder of the Grand Pic de Gabizo. By leaning inwards and clinging with taloned fingers to the brown glissade, digging holds with the welts of my boots into the hard ice-slush wall which slanted at an angle of about 80 degrees above the precipice, I managed to get back to the track of my own footsteps, beside the stone-heaps nearly covered with snow.

But how to proceed? The only thing to do was to descend below the precipice, to risk falling into crevasses, and climb the mountain-side about four kilometres farther on. It would be rough going, and other avalanches might come down; but now I must either go back or go on. The sun was already in the western half of the sky. The travellers' hut I had passed was locked, but if the farther slope was unclimbable, a return might be made to it, and the door battered down.

The map showed the village of Arrens not far away, in the valley beyond the Col de Soulor. I started to climb down, among fallen rocks, patches of snow, and the noises of rapid water. The going was easier than I had anticipated, but the heat was great. Every bone in my feet felt inflamed. A sense of urgency drove me on; gone was the feeling of it being a fine thing. I now wanted to have done with it, it was really a stupid thing I had done. I wanted to get to the valley beyond, and leave my foolhardiness behind. I must not force myself forward mentally, but go steadily and thoughtlessly. And after a couple of hours I began to realise that I would get through to Argèlès. What should I say to her? *Annabelle, I have crossed the mountains to say I love you. Will you marry me, Annabelle?* Married—married to Annabelle! I could not imagine it. What would we do together? But I dismissed these thoughts, which dismayed me. I thought of Barleybright and the owls, of our expeditions together on the Norton, of swimming in the pools of the gravel-pits in the estuary, and imagined myself always with her, myself steady, happy, and cool—Barleybright with eyes blue as the gentians. I began singing at the top of my voice, and the echo of my song was thrown back by the massif of Gabizo.

The climb up the slope went easier, for I went steadily, breathing slowly and deeply, imagining myself an old tranquil man. Above the edge I found the road again, and to my relief this was open, covered with snow only in patches, and with sky-reflecting water. Sheep were grazing on the grey-green grass. I swung

along at about seven kilometres an hour, almost running, thinking how easy it had been. Really, the locals didn't know their own country! Anyone could have done it. All the same, I dared not stop: if I sat down, I felt I might not be able to get up again.

Over the crest of the road the world dropped away into valley and fields, beyond which the snow-caps rose up mightily. On my right the jags and scaurs made the outline of a great petrified bat or pteridactyl hanging spread-winged against the sky. I heard a noise behind, like a deep prolonged *A-ah!* and saw another scatter and rush of snow and rocks pouring down over Le Corniche.

After a while, the road began to zigzag down through green pasture fields, and the village lay below. Seeing two peasants, I cried out dramatically:

"Mon compagnon est tué, tombé au dessous le Corniche!" and hurried away from their shouted questions. Now why had I lied like a bloody fool? I asked myself; it might cause all sorts of trouble: I had shouted it out without thinking, my imagination had seen someone falling, limb-spread and brutally stricken. I made a resolution to control my imagination, as I took short-cuts down the steep fields, my ankles feeling thick and wooden, the soles of my feet aching, but a good feeling within me, that I had done what I said I would do.

I sat in an estaminet, drinking cup after cup of *café-au-lait*, while scribbling postcards to my mother, Valentine, Arthur, the postman in the village where I lodged, Julian, Porky, and others, and Bevan at the Hotel Lutetia in Paris. I began to write a card to Barleybright, but could not continue: the writing made me tired, as though through pen and fingers a concentration of vitality had been rapidly discharged. I began to feel heavy inside me; mournful. Only twelve hours since leaving Laruns, but it seemed a timeless period of life, since it had been fully lived; that had been happiness; and now it was over. I wondered why my sight was weak with tears.

It was no real rest sitting there. I got up, stiffly, paid for the coffee, cards, stamps, humped on my pack, took my staff ("Good old Trusty" I had cried after the avalanche), posted the cards, and walked on. Perhaps they would not be at Argélès after all? And I did not even know the name of the hotel. Should I hire a car and drive there? No, for I had said I would walk to Argélès, and I would walk there.

I walked on down the grey road with the sun on my back and a long shadow preceding me in the dust. Movement was now mechanical; nails and stockings pressing into hot blisters unheeded. Just before eight o'clock I got into Argélès and walked into the first hotel I saw. It had a pale yellow exterior. I engaged a room without daring to ask if any English guests were there. I washed in my room, and sat down on the bed; found it hard to get up, but went down to the dining room, glancing at a dozen tables and people around them. With relief and disappointment I saw that they were not there. Men in dinner jackets, obviously English, stared at me, but I kept my gaze on the tablecloth, conscious of my soiled clothes and wild hair now that I was sitting there. However, it did not worry me. I had no comb, I had used my fingers. I unfixed my sight to rest my mind, and sat there, indifferently.

After a while the prospect of eating the dinner, with its courses, among those formal people became more and more unbearable. Actually, I had been waiting there only three or four minutes; but my nerves were unsettled, and the time seemed a long and unnecessary waste of living. Annabelle's face in the adjacent air began to contemplate me gravely, steadily, strangely; but it was not Annabelle's face: those steadfast eyes were gentian-blue. I drank a glass of wine, another glass and then another, while waiting for the soup. By God, why not finish the bottle? *It's a poor heart that never rejoices, Harry. You are right, old Julian.* I drank the rest of the bottle.

Across the room came the words, *not a sahib*, in a superior female voice. By God, if only Johnny and Julian were with me! But was I not again imagining that the world centred on my little organism? The remark probably didn't refer to me at all: I might be the centre of my world, my little world, I certainly

wasn't of theirs. They were eating fish, wretched undersized trout again, dipped out of the river with a net perhaps, anything for the francs of *le tourisme*. The French sportsmen dropped little handfuls of maggots into the swims or runs, and then put one on a hook, and *Voilà, vive le sport!* Pas de truites, merci! Je ne mange pas les bébés, je ne suis pas Napoléon! Non, pas de cognac Napoléon, encore du vin rosé, s'il vous plaît. Bring some more ruddy wine if you don't understand your own language, my old cabbage. Ah, merci, m'sieu, j'ai grand'soif, m'sieu. Merci, m'sieu! Cork drawn, bobble bobble bobble into the glass; and down the old throat.

Chicken, with salad. I fiddled at the bird with a blunt knife and blunt fork. Chicken, civilised, dull, stupid, enslaved feathered reptiles, pecked their weaker brethren, pulled out their poor little feathers, while the little sick thing stood there sad-eyed, dreaming of heaven, formulating some avian star-born or self-sacrificial dream. I wondered where Johnny had got to. What had caused Johnny to be so offset from life? The War, poisoning his old environment? I had a sudden desire to see Johnnie. My chest felt constricted, and I was breathing fast. More wine. Encore du vin, mademoiselle. J'ai grand'soif, j'avais échappé la mort! The leg on the plate before me was muscular and confident, one of the bully-pecker's legs, so I tore it gladly with my teeth. Steady on the wine, Harry old boy, or you'll be a bad companion. *Cannibal rejects trout, eats sahib. Pleads pour le sport.* D-d-d-damned rotten, Bevan, yes, I agree. I began to snigger to myself, then to my dismay I began to laugh uncontrollably, a backward laugh in the throat, laughing with a muffled creaky laugh, as I had laughed in the classroom ten years before, a sort of ventriloquial laugh from a blank face to escape detection. The sahibs and mem-sahibs were looking at me. Were they going to call a general meeting to have me expelled? I saw myself getting up and saying, *I've just walked over the hills, and am a little hysterical, don't heed me.* No, no, sit still, you fool, *crétin*, as Bevan would say. I felt Julian's red-faced arrogance upon my face, and growling through his scornful lips, *You are a chap, Harry!* I held the third bottle neck down into my glass, and let it bobble-bobble out. The withdrawn bottle flung a graceful arc of wine on the oil-cloth floor. Libation to the spirits of le col d'Aubisque, the Icicle Spirit and the Star-dwarf! A waiter arrived

with sahib-conscious face and deftly obliterated the pattern.

I clattered upstairs to my room. I wasn't drunk, but my feet felt broken across. Having washed, finger-combed my hair, removed my solid boots and leather anklets and stockings, which were stained with raw blisters, and pulled on brown canvas rope-soled shoes, I shuffled out feeling ghost-like and called at the next hotel. The first thing I saw was Sophy's blackthorn thumb-stick. They were at dinner. I looked through the door—Sophy, the General, Queenie, Annabelle, and three other people. Two were middle-aged, and one, next to Annabelle, a dark good-looking fellow of about twenty-one. Non, non, ne les informez pas mes amis, s'il vous plaît. Après dîner, merci, pas maintenant. "That's all right," said the waiter.

38

I shuffled out again, returned, and pulled myself up by the bannisters to my room, to shave, to improve my hair, to brush my teeth. Then I started to undress; hesitated; put on my clothes again, and went back to the other hotel, feeling weak and empty. They were in the drawing room. Queenie saw me first. "Heavens, look what's blown in!" Sophy flushed, and said in a level voice, "Hullo, wherever did you spring from?" The General arose and said genially, "'Evening, Williamson, you look as though you've been in the sun!" I was grateful to him. Introductions, scarcely realised, Do you know Colonel—How do you—and Lady Maude Talbot—How—And this is—How do you do—How d'you do—How d'oo.

"Truly, how did you get here?" asked Queenie.

"I walked over the mountains," I said. "From Laruns."

"Willie's an awful fibber, I must warn you," said Queenie.

"A professional fibber," I explained, with a smile, as though I were enjoying myself.

"When did you come, and how?" asked Sophy, now more herself.

"I came part of the way with Arnold Bennett," I said, "and others. Guns went off on our train, and the shouting at times was continuous. Especially where Roland blew his horn. Hilaire Belloc was indirectly responsible."

Sophy did not say anything.

"Did they come with you here?" asked Annabelle, challengingly.

Dreading lest I show nervousness, I said, with a stammer that came upon me whenever I felt unsure of myself, "Oh no. They w-went on a-alone, together."

There was an awkward silence.

"But how could they go on alone if they went together, I don't understand," suddenly exclaimed Lady Maude.

"He's our tame author—he always babbles like this," explained Queenie.

"Well," I said, "some were alone, the others were together, but we were all in a sense alone. It was rather a queer walk altogether."

To my dismay I began to laugh. It would seem, I knew, rank discourtesy to continue laughing, as though at her remark. I could not stop laughing. I fell sideways across the chair, laughing. Annabelle was laughing, too. "You *are* a ninny!" said Queenie, laughing also. I fell off the chair. Ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! I clutched my aching ribs, all my breath gone in laughing.

"You've been a little too much in the sun, I think," said Sophy, as the coffee arrived. Sophy poured me a cup of black coffee. As I sipped it, I wondered if my eyes were sticking out of my head, and what was I saying, hell, they must think me a complete cad and idiot. Annabelle was talking with animation to—he must be the Talbot she had hunted with in Leicestershire. Not the "Yours truly" family, not the war-profiteers, evidently. I tried to stop the room turning and tilting as I sat beside Queenie, who was asking in a confidential voice if what I had said was true, you didn't really come with Bennett and Belloc, did you, Willie?

"In a sense I did," I said. "Especially Belloc."

The room was steady now. "I've come to ask Annabelle if she'll accept the—oh damn—dedication of my new book."

"You're tight, aren't you?"

"I think I drank too much snow-water this morning."

"You *are* an idiot. Why don't you dedicate your book to me?"

"You wouldn't like it."

"I bet I'd appreciate it more than Annabelle would. She thinks you're barmy."

"I hear you write," said Lady Maude, amiably. "Are you any relation to C. N. and A. M. Williamson? They write of motoring, too, don't they? Although one never remembers names or titles of a book."

"Well, actually——"

"He'll say they are his mother and father, Lady Maude. The sun has touched him. I ought to warn you, he's liable to produce a manuscript and read it aloud without warning."

"Really, most interesting," murmured Lady Maude.

I sat on my hands. Curse, I was being nervous again. Sitting like that, my left wrist pushed the pages of the manuscript out of the inside poacher pocket of my jacket. I thrust them back quickly.

"I told you so!" cried Queenie. "He's brought a manuscript with him!"

"Oh lor', that's too much!" said Annabelle. "Stop him, someone, quick!"

"No, really," I said, "I always carry it there in the evening, in case it's stolen."

"You really *are* a ninny!" said Queenie. "Who would steal your manuscripts, I should like to know?"

"I'd like to hear it some time, but just at the moment I feel I could not do justice to literature," said the General. "Had rather a hard day," he added. "Got your pipe with you, Williamson?" He held out his pouch.

"I have given up smoking, thank you, sir." Curse, my voice was almost inaudible.

"We've all had rather a long day," said Sophy. Her face was blank.

"If you'll forgive me," said Lady Maude, "I think I'll go to bed. We've had a somewhat strenuous day, and another tomorrow——"

"Yes, my dear, yes . . ." said her husband, "I'm looking forward to seeing Foch's birthplace tomorrow . . . don't get up, please."

Goodnights being said, "Don't be late, dear," Lady Maude spoke from the door, which her son had leapt up to open for her.

"Rather not, old thing." I envied him his nonchalance, the ease with which he used the slightly disreputable endearment then in fashion.

We sat down again.

Brian Talbot sat beside Annabelle. The General reclined in his chair, thoughtfully smoking his pipe. Sophy sat beside him. I sat still, looking on the carpet. With mournful weariness increasing, I sat there, the more dumbly as I wished to get away after Annabelle and Talbot had slipped off, he murmuring about seeing the driver of the cars for tomorrow's visit to Pau. The *cars!* of course, the "young people" would go together: I, though I was not going, would have been "one of the older ones", as Sophy often had referred to me.

"Well, how are you, and how did you know we were here?" asked Sophy, quietly.

"Oh, I just happened to w-w-walk over the m-mountains," I stammered.

"You look tired," said Sophy. "You ought to go to bed. Are you staying very long?"

I managed to say, as I got on my feet, that I had to leave on the morrow.

"We are going out for the day early, and so probably we won't meet again before you go, so I'll say goodbye now," said Sophy.

"Goodnight," I said, making myself smile, as I bowed. "Goodnight, and thank you so much. I think I'll go back to my hotel. Goodnight, Queenie. Goodnight, sir."

"Goodnight, old man, have a good rest," said Sophy.

"You've done too much, coming from Laruns: I know that pass. Well, good luck to you," said the General.

I found myself hesitating; but got myself together, and with a little wave of a hand got through the doorway into the safety of the night, and so to my hotel, and my bedroom.

39

For a long time I could not sleep. My feet and the bones of my legs ached intolerably, and a feeling of being withdrawn from the bed's level and suspended out of the horizontal made me clutch the bedside table to steady myself in sudden fear. When at last I dozed off it was into a sleep disrupted by nightmares wherein I was falling from the parapet of le Corniche, flash upon flash of sweat and terror, and a voice

was crying out soundlessly in the fixed yet swaying immobility of appalling space. I was falling, yet I could not fall; I was crying out, no sound came from my mouth, yet I heard myself shrieking, in flash upon flash of sweat and terror, while someone was gripping my arm, striving to pull me back from the contemplated swaying fixity of space. *M'sieu, M'sieu! Attendez, attendez, s'il vous plaît!* The light was shining in my face, and two men were standing by my bed, I perceived with a blow of terror, followed by relief. One I saw was a gendarme, the other the proprietor of the hotel.

"*M'sieu, s'il vous plaît! Veuillez vous calmer. Ce n'est rien, m'sieu.*" He was asking me to dress, and come downstairs. I replied in my halting French. The proprietor spoke English. "A mere formality, sir. Please not to be upset, a few questions. Your passport, *m'sieu?*"

They wanted to see my passport, and why couldn't they wait until the morning? But this was France. Perhaps a report had come through that we had come down the Pass of Roncesvalles without showing our passports to the French officials. It was cold, and I had neither dressing gown nor coat, so I put on my trousers, tied on the rope-soled shoes, and with jacket collar turned up, followed, no, I was followed, by the gendarme down the stairs to the *salle-à-manger*, where a white-enamelled stove gave some heat. Questions began, the proprietor explaining again it was a mere formality; although I wondered why the pale-faced man in the black suit was sitting there with notebook and pencil before him, ready to write at my replies. Did they take me for a bandit?

They copied details of my passport. When did I arrive, what day was it, where were my companions, who were they, why did we go to Spain, stay only one day, then return to France? Did I come from Laruns? Did I start alone to cross the Col? Why did I start, after warnings from the *patron* of the hotel? Had I a comrade with me? Did I tell two men above Arrens that my companion was fallen from le Corniche, that he was dead? Yes, I did say that. Who was the companion? No one. Then why did I say it? For a joke. A joke, what was that? Ah, an English falsehood. Yes, it was a falsehood. What time did I say that to the two men? In the late afternoon.

The interpreter translated, the clerk wrote rapidly, question

and answer. Was I not with an English demoiselle, *une jeune fille*? Yes, the day before, in the afternoon. At Laruns? Also on my journey? No, I was alone on my journey. All the way? Yes. Then did my two friends not accompany me? Yes, part of the way, they said *au revoir* at Eaux Chaudes. It *was* hot, too. Ignoring the feeble joke, the gendarme asked sternly why had I declared that I had made the journey alone? All the while the man with the pale impassive face was writing in his book. He wrote in shorthand. At what time did I see the two men? In the morning, about *huit heures*. But I said before I saw them in the afternoon? I said the two men of Arrens in the afternoon. To whom the English joke, or French falsehood.

I felt queer, and the room was tilting. There was a knocking on the door, and a woman came in, the wife of the proprietor, or manager. She spoke rapidly to the gendarme. *Venons*, said the gendarme, and the manager said, "You are called to the telephone, m'sieu."

"I say, what is all this about? For God's sake, can't this formality wait till the morning?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is not my affair, m'sieu. As you perceive, the police——" He spread his hands. He spoke in French, rapidly, to the policeman. "You may go, m'sieu, to the telephone, but the legality is that this gendarme accompanies you, if you please. This way, m'sieu."

We went down a passage. The telephone, in the manager's office.

Far away, through a faint crackling sound, like on the wireless when atmospherics were fretting the voice, I heard someone faintly asking, "Is that you, H.W.? Is that H.W.?"

"Yes, who is it? Irene?"

It was Irene. Had I heard anything? I did not know what to reply. I am being questioned by the police, I said. I am being spoken to by the police, but I do not know what it is all about. Then Irene's voice, speaking very slowly, and though it was dim, I knew she was speaking loudly, said that Barley, yes, I heard the name, Irene, Barleybright, yes, yes, I can hear you, Barleybright left early in the morning—can you hear me, H.W.—yes, I hear you—Barley—Bright—left—early—while—I—was—asleep—to—stop—you—trying to cross—the—Col d'Aubisque—and—has—not—returned.

I felt myself struck by an icy chill. "Hold on a minute!" I heard myself crying. "Hold—the—line."

The dark-dressed clerk was watching me expressionlessly. My voice was saying shakily, "I have just heard from a friend in Laruns that her daughter followed me, apparently, this morning, yesterday morning, that is, into the mountains and that the girl has not come back!"

"M'sieu!"

My teeth were chattering. Cognac, café cognac, I said to the manager. Cognac, vite! he said to his wife. C'est moi, aussi, added the gendarme. Ah, the telephone!

Irene was saying that a search party had been out since night-fall. H.W., it may be serious, she followed you up and has not come back, did you see anything of her? Were there any avalanches? I saw two falls, both slight. I got down the precipice. I fell down, I slid down, I got down somehow, it was fearfully hot down there, and I thought I would never climb up out of it, but I did in the end. She may be in the traveller's hut, H.W., she knows her way about, but of course though she knows no fear, she is very young, only a child really, H.W. She took food and two pairs of snow-shoes, she was most concerned about you, H.W. I didn't know until I read a note she left behind. It was rather foolhardy for you to go, wasn't it? I am terribly sorry, Irene. Can you hear me? I am fearfully sorry. I will put on my boots at once and go up through Arrens to the Col d'Aubisque and see if I can find her when the sun rises. Of course I will. If these people will let me, they are asking questions. Have you seen my two friends, Bevan and Guy? Yes, I can hear you better now. Is it the turbine-generator noise on the wire? No, she didn't say a word to me yesterday about coming with me, Irene. I wouldn't have let her come. Oh, I don't know, I don't matter, and you know what a fixed idea is. Yes, I saw her. Oh, nothing happened. I know it is finished. Please, say nothing about it. Barleybright, Irene, I—I—look, I can't stay here, I'm going to walk up from Arrens. No, you mustn't think any more of going out, you can't do anything, H.W. I expect it will be all right. Only promise to ring me at once if she turns up, and she might easily, and bring her back, H.W., won't you? Hire a car, I'll pay for it. Of course you won't, Irene, I won't hear of it. Though I had only two hundred francs, I thought.

Yes, I'll write down the number. Hold on, just a minute! The lady wishes me to write down a number of her telephone in Laruns. They pushed paper and pencil for me, and I wrote it down. Goodnight, Irene, please don't worry, I feel sure she will turn up. Yes, I'll come and see you in the morning, unless I am under arrest. Of course it is a pure formality, H.W., and it will come all right, we will soon all be laughing over it. Now you go and get some sleep, H.W., you must be frightfully tired, I don't know how you got over at all. Oh, it was fairly easy. Irene, I am sure Barley will come back in the morning.

We said goodnight once again, I promised to go back to Laruns and see Irene, and then I found I was weeping. I felt as though I had just come out of the Somme, the life had oozed out of my aching body. The tears dripped from my eyes, running down my neck, I had to sit down, I tried to drink a glass of cognac, choked over it, but swallowed it, and drank some more. The base of my skull seemed to have a burning iron held against it, my feet hurt me, my senseless and stupid feet that would not go any more. O Barleybright, for Christ's sake don't die, you are my friend, you are the truth of the gentian. I could not go back to bed, I went upstairs, accompanied by the gendarme and the clerk, put my shirt over my pyjamas, buttoned up my jacket, thought to put on my stockings but they were hard and matted and repulsive, my teeth were chattering, I must go with them to wherever it was they were going. I went with them to their headquarters, where I signed a statement, not knowing or caring what it was, and sat by the stove until the light came, and the peaks of the mountains showed high and savage black along the sky.

Three small spots burned in my heart, my feet could only shuffle back to the hotel. I washed and shaved, for something to do, and went down into the bitter bright light of morning, the shadows long on the road, but already a feeling of heat in the wide sky. I drank some coffee, but could not eat. In the eating room a man seemed about to speak to me, but I forestalled him and moved away, feeling that I could barely breathe, so constricting were the spots burning in my heart. About midday I was called to the telephone again, to learn from Irene that Barleybright had been found, she was dead, her back had been broken when she fell from le Corniche.

I sat with Irene all through the night, we played Tchaikovsky and Grieg and Dvorak on the gramophone, we drank coffee and ate cheese and bread and saucisson, and I held her in my arms and laid my cheek on her head, comforting her, feeling that now I knew truly what friendship was. At times it seemed that Barley was near, looking directly at me, as though her will-power were being directed into and for me. It may have been my low physical state, but I did not feel any sense of loss; yet I knew that if it all turned out to be a nightmare, and suddenly I were to see her alive and walking into the room, I would go straight to her, and never again be able to leave her. She was my true self.

Irene told me she had never shown fear. Irene did not think she had ever felt fear. She had seldom cried as a baby. She had always been allowed to do what she wanted to do, and yet never had she been selfish or in the least way given any trouble. She had disliked school, but had not given any trouble; she had resented much of the school work as a waste of time, but had always done it, quietly, and without complaint. Irene said there was only one living person she had heard of, and indeed she had glimpsed him once in Cairo, who had seemed to her to be like Barleybright, and that was a man called Lawrence of Arabia. His book had just been serialised in the *Daily Telegraph*. Had I heard of him?

Yes, and I told Irene how when I had read the first paragraph of his book in the paper, a few weeks before, I had thought to myself that one day we would be friends. I had known him at once from that paragraph. The legend of a mysterious Colonel Lawrence I had heard during the war. He had been a personage of legendary distinction far above my obscure self; but that paragraph had been a revelation of his true self, and I knew one day we would seek and know each other: that he would know me, as soon as he read my real writing. I had hardly dared to think this, at the time of reading, to myself; but I could tell Irene, for she was the mother of Barleybright.

In my pocket book was the piece I had cut out of the paper. I knew by heart the opening sentence,

When at last we were anchored in Jeddah's outer harbour, off the white town hung between the blazing sky and its reflection in the mirage which swept and rolled over the wide lagoon, then the heat of Arabia came out like a drawn sword and struck us speechless.

After the funeral I said goodbye to Irene, and took the train to Lourdes, but I found nothing there. The Grotto was hung with rotting crutches and trusses, while fifty or sixty people, most of them invalids, sat and lay before it. I returned up the street, where hundreds of thousands of souvenirs were for sale in the shops, to the station, leaving as soon as I could that town of pale people in black clothes who stared at me and my English tweeds, big boots, leather anklets, and long pole. The train took me to Bordeaux, where I dined alone in an empty restaurant, and it was while waiting for the Paris train that the sense of loss struck me, and I hardly knew how to contain my feelings. I caught the midnight train to Paris. My money was almost gone, but I was glad to be travelling third class because I could lie down in the corridor and feel not so alone, with the legs of the peasants stepping over me most of the night. In Paris I met Guy and Bevan, who talked of the beauties of Chartres, and went to the theatre with them, as their guest, seeing for the first time a *revue* at the Folies Bergères. The hotel was crowded. Guy and Bevan and I slept in three beds in one room, and I was glad to have them near me, they were kind to me, who was so dull. I could not speak of what had happened, or of much else.

I looked in the continental *Daily Mail* for any reference to Laruns, but saw nothing. Among the items of the Personal column, however, I saw the announcement of the engagement to be married of Sophy and the General. When my two friends were leaving for England the following day, Bevan lent me five hundred francs, and I went to Amiens, thence to Albert, and walked over the old battlefields I had known on the Somme, with aching heart for all things remembered in ancient sunlight, but with hope for the future.



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